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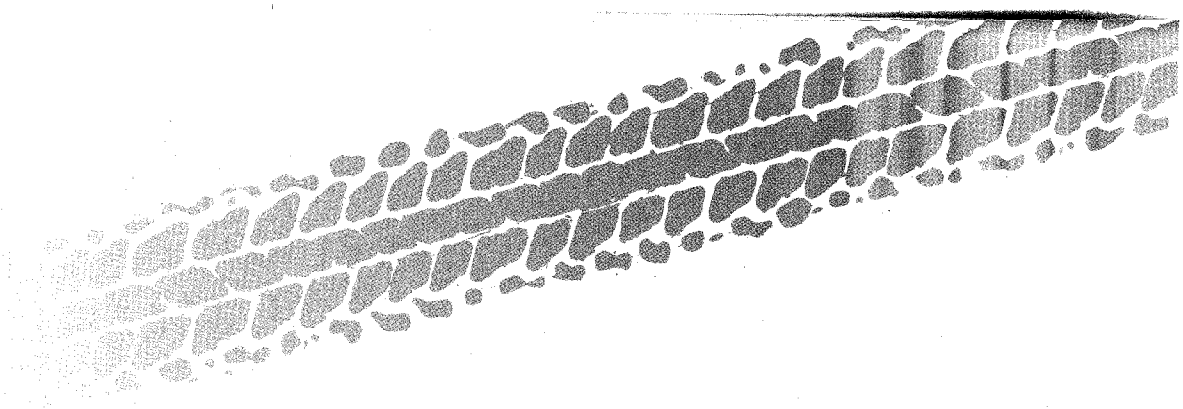

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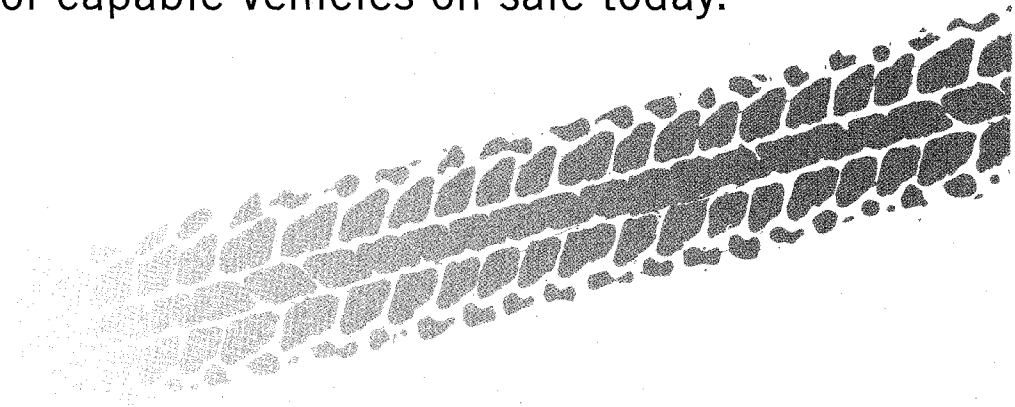

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A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND THE ARTS

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COVER ILLUSTRATION BY *Esther Pearl Watson*

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CORRESPONDENCE

PLAY WRONG

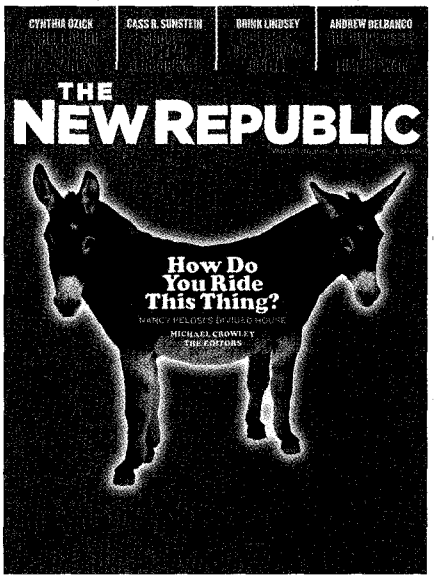
I WISH TO PROTEST CYNTHIA OZICK'S treatment of Rachel Corrie ("Martyr," December 11). Corrie is a shining example of human idealism—an inspiration to all of us who fight for human rights and dignity around the world and especially in Israel. During many demonstrations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories against the Annexation Wall, house demolitions, and the other curses of occupation, we Israeli peace activists have come to know and respect International Solidarity Movement activists. More power to them!

URI AVNERY
Former member, the Knesset
Founder, Gush Shalom
Jerusalem, Israel

AS AN ACTOR AND A PLAYWRIGHT who tries to stage the world's complexity, I suspect I would hate Corrie's fashionable dogma. The gushing reviews and hype have nurtured my resentment. But Ozick only attacks Corrie's willful ignorance and false witness with her own. Ozick excuses her failure to see the play by assuring us she knows the difference between script and performance. Good, so why didn't she go to a show? Instead she combed the script, based on Corrie's journal entries, for evidence of Corrie's small-mindedness. But, while most readers and audience members presumably receive it in its proper context, Ozick cites a dreamy line about wanting to travel to South America as proof that Corrie lacks "all historical understanding." When Corrie recounts learning her first Arabic phrases—including "Bush is a tool"—Ozick chalks this up to indoctrination, not to honest observation of a disturbingly polarized society. Congratulations, Ms. Ozick, for countering Corrie's 23-year-old rant with one of your own, then passing it off as wise and studied criticism.

DAN HOYLE
San Francisco, California

CYNTHIA OZICK RESPONDS:
If I were writing a satirical fiction looking to lampoon a politically egregious far-left character (as I sometimes have done), and if this ludicrously delusional



person were to submit, to a sober journal of ideas, a reality-distorting letter derived from Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, it would turn out to be, word for word, identical to Uri Avnery's wondrously farcical epistolary effusion. All those passionately politicized capital letters! Every known fact stood on its head! Human shields taken for human rights! All history and context excised! And this from a former member of the Israeli parliament! (Not to mention that crazed old Canaanite movement, which roundly reviled all things Jewish.) Any novelist would be proud to have invented such an improbable Uri Avnery. I devoutly wish I had; but *tant pis*, he's scooped me and gone and invented himself. As for Dan Hoyle, who "tries to stage the world's complexity," he will soon be obliged to face the complicating happenstance that Corrie's writings are scheduled to be published in book form, in which case her words will have to stand entirely on their own, without theatrical embellishment, as they surely deserve. Or, perhaps, in the simplicity of his devotion to complexity, Hoyle distrusts plain words read in the absence of mesmerizing stage effects and lines rendered "dreamy." Yet the salient shocking point of *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, whether encountered dreamily on stage or more directly in print, is that it openly declares Corrie to be a victim of a bloodthirsty, purposeful murder. And that is a politically tendentious and criminalizing lie.

WAR ON ERROR

I IMMENSELY ENJOYED READING CASS R. Sunstein's review and found it to be both thoughtful and enlightening ("The Case for Fear," December 11). However, his agreement with Robert Goodin's contention that, to some degree, politicians are terrorists is based on a severely flawed analogy. Goodin posits that, if Jones, a member of a "liberation front," plants a bomb somewhere and warns public authorities that he will detonate it unless certain demands are met, then Jones is a terrorist. If Smith, a member of the same terrorist organization, is the one who issues the warning (though he does not plant the bomb), he, too, is a terrorist. So far, so good. But Goodin then suggests that if Williams, someone not part of the group but who supports them, learns of this and warns authorities in the hopes that they will avert detonation by acceding to the demands, he is equally a terrorist. On the basis of this last claim, Sunstein agrees with Goodin's argument that politicians are terrorists by fueling public fear. But, for this analogy to work, he makes the unwarranted assumption that a) politicians support terrorists' causes and b) politicians hope we will accede to their demands. Without these two assumptions, the analogy flounders. It is surprising that Sunstein, a distinguished law professor at Chicago, fails to see this critical distinction.

KEVIN YEH
Ithaca, New York

CASS R. SUNSTEIN REPLIES:
Kevin Yeh is entirely right to say that assumptions a) and b) may be unwarrant-

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THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 236, Number 5, Issue 4,802, January 29, 2007. (Printed in the United States on January 18, 2007.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated January 1 thru 15, February 19 & 26, April 9 & 16, June 4 & 11, July 9 & 16, August 13 & 20, September 10 & 17, November 26 & December 3, and December 31, 2007 thru January 14, 2008) at 1331 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. For advertising inquiries, please contact Jillian Wheat at (202) 508-4444. Yearly subscriptions, $79.97; foreign, $119.97 (U.S. funds); Canada, $99.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $8.00 domestic and $10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling). © 2007 by The New Republic, LLC. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 628-9383. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (e-mail address: letters@tnr.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call (800) 827-1289 or visit our website at www.thenewrepublic.com.

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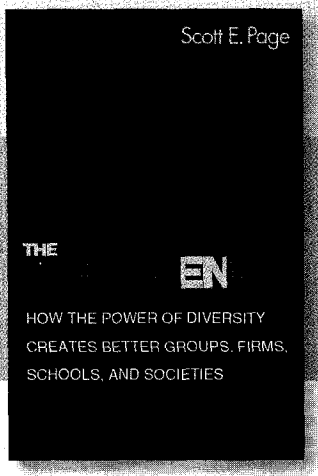

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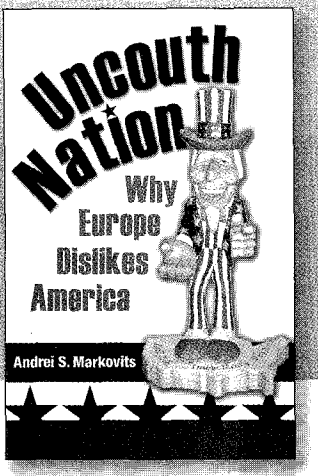

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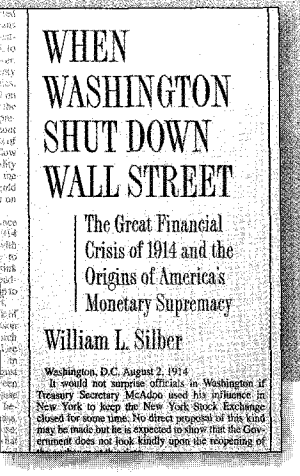

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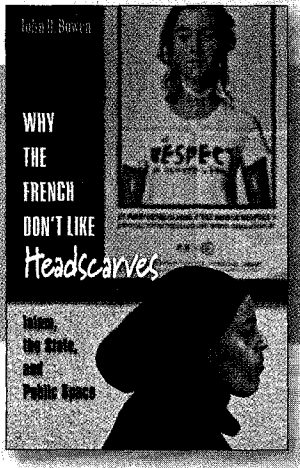

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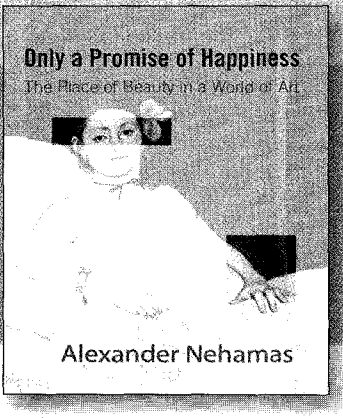

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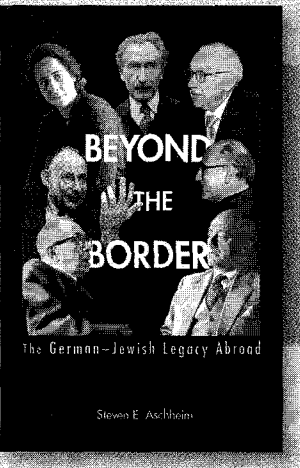

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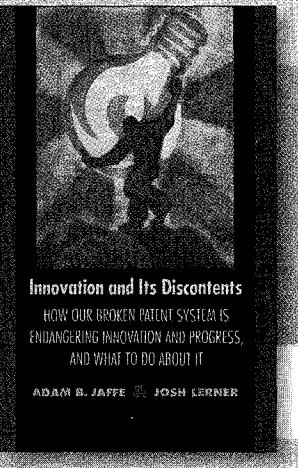
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Sects Maniac

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

WHEN WILL WE FINALLY take no for an answer? In December, Bush administration officials began talking about a surge of U.S. troops to Baghdad to create the military conditions for political reconciliation. Such an effort, they said, would only succeed if Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki reached courageously across sectarian lines, disarming the Shia militias that buttress his government and sharing political power with Iraq's beleaguered Sunnis. "If the Iraqi government does not follow through on its promises," President Bush declared when he unveiled the surge plan to the nation, "it will lose the support of the American people."

And, since December, here's what Maliki has done: First, his aides told reporters that he didn't want any more U.S. troops in Baghdad. To the contrary, he wanted all U.S. troops *out* of Iraq's capital. Maliki, it turned out, had a plan of his own. Iraqi troops would attack Sunni insurgents only, while ignoring the Shia militias. In other words, in a city increasingly cleansed of Sunnis and run by Moqtada Al Sadr's brutal Mahdi army, Maliki would hasten the job.

American officials threatened and cajoled, and Maliki supposedly backed down. But, at a January 11 press conference where he was expected to endorse Bush's surge, Maliki didn't show up. Instead, a spokesman told the press that Iraq's government "will not stand against it" before adding that "what is suitable for our conditions in Iraq is what we decide, not what others decide for us."

Behind the scenes, it seems, American and Iraqi officials had reached a deal. Maliki would appoint a commander for Baghdad to oversee Iraq's share of the new military offensive. Maliki agreed, according to *The New York Times*, because the commander would be less beholden to the Defense Ministry, which is run by a Sunni and closely monitored by the United States. And, on January 12, he made his pick, rejecting America's preferred candidates and picking an obscure Shia naval officer. None of the non-Shia parties in Iraq's supposed national-unity government had been consulted. "Nobody asked us," one Sunni legislator told the *Los Angeles Times* about the man charged with leading the military effort to close Iraq's gaping sectarian divide. "This is the first I've heard."

Nobody asked the Sunnis about Saddam Hussein's execution, either. There were, after all, good reasons to postpone the hanging. For one thing, Saddam had only been convicted of murdering Shia (in retaliation, as it happens, for an execution attempt by Maliki's Dawa party). He was still awaiting trial for his crimes against Kurds and other Iraqis. Moreover, he was set to be executed on the day Sunnis begin celebrating the holiday of Eid Al Adha. (Shia begin celebrating a day later.) And, finally, his execution violated Iraqi law. In Iraq, a death sentence requires the approval of the country's president (a Kurd) and two vice presidents (a Shia and a Sunni). But Maliki, channeling Dick Cheney, insisted he had all the legal authority he needed and rushed Saddam to the gallows, where the former dictator was mocked by Sadr's henchmen, prompting mass Sunni outrage.

Does this sound like a man interested in courageous efforts to bring Sunnis and Shia together? Of course not. Before becoming prime minister, Maliki was known as a Shia hard-liner who wanted to limit Sunni influence in the committee drafting Iraq's constitution—and tried to bar virtually all former Baath party officials from government office. He became prime minister largely because of Sadr, who functions as a kind of Tom DeLay to his Dennis Hastert. After he was sworn in last May, the United States urged him to rewrite Iraq's oil law, soften de-Baathification, and rein in the Shia militias, all to show Sunnis that he was their prime minister, too. Eight months later, we're still asking.

Maliki's behavior is a big part of the reason so many in the U.S. military opposed the surge. Over the past year, he has repeatedly blocked them from going after Sadr's men, and, when they have captured members of the Mahdi army, he has sometimes intervened to secure their release. "Repeated reports from our commanders on the ground contributed to our concerns about Maliki's government," wrote National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley last November in a memo leaked to *The New York Times*. Pressed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about Maliki's government last week, Condoleezza Rice lamely replied that "the fact that they didn't act properly in the past does not mean that they won't act properly in the future."

As evidence of Maliki's change of heart, Bush administration officials are claiming they finally have the green light to go after Sadr. Except that Maliki's advisers say the opposite, insisting that U.S. troops can only go into the sprawling Shia slum known as Sadr City with their approval. We are, to put it bluntly, being used. Maliki has only consented to more U.S. troops because he thinks they will help him cleanse Baghdad of Sunnis. Already, there are reports that Sadr's men are taking off their uniforms, stashing their weapons, and dismantling their checkpoints. As they go underground, Maliki will declare the Shia militia problem solved and push the United States to throw its full weight against the Sunni insurgents who are guarding Sunni neighborhoods from Shia takeover.

This is what it means to send more U.S. troops into the teeth of a civil war. President Bush says we are surging to support Iraqi leaders committed to reconciliation across sectarian lines. But the Iraqi leaders he's conjuring up no longer live in Iraq. Defeated at the polls and fearful for their lives, they now reside in Amman, London, or the United States. Maliki, the sectarian, fundamentalist leader of a sectarian, fundamentalist government, has taken their place. And, given the political climate in Iraq today, even if he were overthrown, the likely successors would be just as bad.

"Do we and Prime Minister Maliki share the same vision for Iraq?" wondered Hadley in his November memo. Virtually everything Maliki has done in recent weeks screams no. How much more evidence do we need, and how many more Americans must die, before we take that no for an answer?

PETER BEINART

Peter Beinart is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

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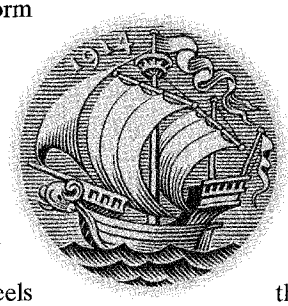
Mr. Universe

For years, Republicans have attacked advocates of universal health insurance as "socialists." But what are they going to call Arnold Schwarzenegger? Last Monday, the Republican governor announced that he wants to bring universal coverage to California—just as another Republican governor, Mitt Romney, recently did for Massachusetts. This would be the same Schwarzenegger who, in his 2004 prime-time address to the Republican National Convention, decried European-style socialism, pledged his "faith in free enterprise," and called Democrats "economic girlie-men" for harping on the financial insecurity of their fellow citizens. Apparently, this was before he realized that millions of Californians were struggling with medical bills—and that only government could solve the crisis. Who's the girlie-man now?

Of course, Schwarzenegger and Romney aren't the only elected officials talking about universal health care these days. Two Democratic senators, Ron Wyden and Ted Kennedy, are touting plans of their own. More plans should be forthcoming from their party's presidential candidates. Still, it's Schwarzenegger, like Romney before him, getting all the attention. And with good reason. When prominent Republicans start embracing universal coverage, it's a sign that the next great debate about health care has begun.

But how will it end? A lot depends on how liberals react to proposals like Schwarzenegger's. On the one hand, his plan represents a clear departure from the previous decade, when even Democrats limited themselves to incrementalism. It would give coverage to virtually every California citizen and would break some important political taboos along the way. The plan features extensive regulations of the insurance industry, so that it cannot exclude people with prior medical conditions. It also has higher taxes and requirements that employers contribute toward health insurance. There is even bigger government, in the form of expanded Medicaid.

Still, the plan has some serious drawbacks. For one thing, its minimum-benefits package seems meager, which could encourage employers who now offer more generous coverage to cut back. For another, its financing scheme makes some heroic assumptions about the savings that reform will produce.



But perhaps the biggest problem with Schwarzenegger's plan is the danger that it could stall momentum for more sweeping changes—both in California and beyond. His proposal arrives on the heels of a measure he vetoed last year that would have created a single-payer system—the most comprehensive type of reform, in that it seeks to blow up the entire health care system and have government insure citizens directly. Yet even people who support single-payer may be tempted to rally around schemes like Schwarzenegger's, which have more limited ambitions, because they might fear their preferred plans couldn't pass.

It's a reasonable instinct. Reformers with long memories know that the United States probably came closest to creating universal coverage in 1974, when Richard Nixon (hey, another Republican!) embraced the idea, only to have Democrats reject it because they believed they could pass a better plan.

But it's not self-evident that moderate plans are so politically viable, either. Consider what happened to Bill Clinton, who tried desperately to blunt the opposition of special interest groups and get past Americans' well-known skepticism of government. The result was a plan so complicated that it failed to capture the public's imagination. Meanwhile, even interest groups that stood to benefit ceded the political field to organizations that opposed change.

At the very least, it's premature for would-be reformers to "settle" on a plan that, like Schwarzenegger's, has some major flaws. If this plan defines the outer limits of political acceptability, then whatever compromise it finally produces will likely have even greater deficiencies.

Yes, champions of universal coverage should welcome the likes of Schwarzenegger to their cause. But these common areas of belief should be the beginning of discussion, not the end. There is a time for compromise, and that time will come soon enough. But, right now, advocates of universal health care should speak openly and unabashedly about what they actually believe is right, even if that means proclaiming ambitions that defy conventional notions of the politically possible. That is how you stretch the boundaries of debate. And that is how reform, eventually, will happen. ■

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Beirut Dispatch

Eau No

BY ANNIA CIEZADLO

LAST SUMMER, DURING the war with Israel, Hezbollah's Al Manar satellite TV channel ran an advertisement featuring Reem Haidar, an attractive Lebanese woman with a special request for Hezbollah leader Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah. "I want his cloak that he sweated in while he was defending me, my children, my sisters, and my land," said Haidar, with a toss of her highlighted hair, as martial music played in the background. "I want it so that I can rub some of its sweat on myself and my children. Maybe they can also distribute pieces of it to the people, so that they can soak up some dignity, honor, and nobility." In her sunglasses, plunging v-neck, and red bandanna, Haidar made quite an impression. Al Manar put the Haidar clip in heavy rotation, and, after the war, she got her wish: Hezbollah presented her with Nasrallah's presumably sweat-soaked clerical robe.

Haidar's desire for the perspiration of Hezbollah's black-turbaned leader may strike Americans as a little odd (imagine—or perhaps don't—women clamoring for the sweaty garments of Dick Cheney). But the odor of sanctity is a powerful draw; just as Catholics traditionally believed that the bodies of saints gave off the scent of roses, Shia believe that the soil of Karbala—where the martyr Imam Hussein was beheaded—smells sweet, like musk. Muslim or Christian, man or woman, everybody wears perfume here: Men hawk bootleg couture fragrances on street corners, and stores will custom blend knockoffs of your favorite fragrance while you wait. So, given the cult of Nasrallah and the culture of perfume, perhaps it was inevitable that, sooner or later, Beirut's latest must-have item would invoke the essence of his sweaty robes: the "Perfume of Resistance"—eau de Hezbollah.

I first smelled the Perfume of Resistance at the opposition sit-in that has occupied downtown Beirut since December 1, 2006, in an attempt to topple the U.S.-backed government. There seemed to be some disagreement about what exactly the smell of the resistance was: Non-Shia, outraged at seeing Lebanon's permanent underclass occupy its swank city center, started sending out text messages sneering that the protesters smelled bad. (One suggested that the statue of dead Sunni politician Riad Solh came to life in order to hold its nose.) But, for the Shia faithful and their Christian allies, the sit-in had taken on the character of an outdoor bazaar, with vendors offering a wide and enticing array of Hezbollah-themed items. It was there, amid all the tchotchkes of resistance—Hezbollah banners, Hezbollah cell phone holders, flashing Hezbollah buttons, lighted crystal Nasrallah paperweights, smiling Nasrallah keychains—that I spotted the little yellow packets of Nasrallah-themed perfume.

The *Attar* (literally, essence) of Resistance comes in jasmine, gardenia, and tea rose (the latter, because it supposedly found favor with Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, is rumored to be Nasrallah's personal pick). The slender vials are packaged in little laminated folders with excerpts from Nasrallah's speeches printed inside. On the front, Nasrallah waves a hortatory hand, with Lebanese and Hezbollah flags fluttering behind him, while a missile sinks an Israeli gunboat. On the back, there's a photo collage of lilies and rocket launchers. All this for $1? Who could resist?

Everybody wanted some. A friend took it to work, only to spend all day fending off coworkers' attempts to swipe it. "I had to take it home at the end of the day," she told me. "They were just waiting for me to leave so they could steal it!" We went back downtown to find more, but the vendor just shrugged; he was sold out. So I set out for the *dahiyeh*, the sprawling Shia ghetto on the outskirts of Beirut, to track down the perfume's creator.

The label of the new fragrance inspired by Hezbollah.

A VOLUBLE, APPLE-cheeked man with earnest brown eyes and a tuft of silvery hair, Ali Khalil was waiting by the door of his storefront. Hezbollah members don't usually shake hands with female nonrelatives, but Khalil, the 45-year-old Shia entrepreneur who dreamed up the perfume, is a man of commerce and is not a party member. Gripping my hand warmly, he led me inside his tiny shop, which bursted with gewgaws: beaded purses, Furbys, nail polish, clear bra straps, toy cell

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phones, cap guns, teddy bears, Hello Kitty thermoses, plastic jewelry, temporary tattoos. On display was also a wide selection of bootleg perfumes, from "Veirsache" to "Bolgari." But the Perfume of Resistance is Khalil's baby.

In Lebanon, the word "resistance" often denotes Hezbollah's rockets, missiles, and machine guns, which the United States and Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's government want to take away. But it also has a broader meaning: of popular struggle against Israel, the United States, or Western powers. For Khalil—who is also a poet, prisoners' rights activist, and occasional independent political candidate—the resistance doesn't have to be violent. "I don't believe in weapons or arms," says Khalil, who deplores the September 11 attacks on the United States. "There are many ways of resisting. Resistance can be a word; it can take many forms." Like perfume.

Khalil's inspiration came on September 22, 2006, five weeks after the end of last summer's war, when Hezbollah staged an enormous rally in the bombed-out ruins of the Shia neighborhoods where its offices used to be. As hundreds of thousands packed into the newly cleared square to celebrate the "divine victory," Khalil looked around and saw a sea of trinkets bearing pictures of Nasrallah. "I decided that I wanted people to have something more enduring," says Khalil. "I wanted people to know the essence of the resistance."

After the rally, Khalil ordered 15,000 bottles of perfume and had the packages printed up at a cost of $3,000—a big financial risk for a small-time capitalist. "Because it had the picture of Sayyid Hassan, I didn't care as much about the expense. I wanted it to look nice," he explains. "It was less a commercial venture than an opportunity to send a message."

Message sent. People bought dozens as gifts for friends in Bahrain, Syria, Japan, Sierra Leone, Germany, Sweden—even Denmark. A Lebanese guy from Dearborn, Michigan, passing through on his way to the hajj, wanted some but was afraid to take it back to the United States. Khalil started to field requests for spinoffs. An Iraqi man asked Khalil if he could make Moqtada Al Sadr perfume. He even got calls from Christian neighborhoods like Ashrafiyye. One Christian caller asked if the perfume smelled "like blood or gunpowder," but others liked it; many of them requested a scent for Michel Aoun, the Maronite Christian general who is aligned with Hezbollah against the current government.

But, despite the perfume's popularity, you won't find Nasrallah doing product endorsements for Resistance: Both it and its sister line, the Perfume of Victory, are knockoffs. In other words, it isn't actually produced or sanctioned by Hezbollah, which presumably has more pressing matters on its collective mind, like bringing down Siniora's government. But Hezbollah's leaders are nothing if not media-savvy; they know free advertising when they see it. Getting ripped off is just another form of viral marketing, and so the group takes an indulgent line on piracy. "Nasrallah is in the public domain; he's not private property," says Hussein Rahhal, Hezbollah's affable spokesman. "There are more people outside Hezbollah who love Nasrallah than there are members in the party, and so we treat him as a public figure." The perfume, says Rahhal, is a testament to Nasrallah's crossover power. "This shows how the resistance is now part of the popular culture," he notes with satisfaction, "and not just a political movement." Nasrallah as global brand.

The perfume was so successful, in fact, that Khalil went to the Ministry of Trade and copyrighted the idea for 15 years, worried that some unscrupulous businessman with deeper pockets might edge him out. "I'm thinking of expanding," he says thoughtfully. "I'm thinking of doing a deodorant spray." By way of demonstration, he leaps up and grabs a tube of the cologne "Poca Cobanne." He has no shortage of ideas for future Nasrallah knockoffs, including a great plastic cell phone with—"But wait, maybe you'd better not write about that," he says, furrowing his brow. "Somebody might read about it and steal my idea." ■

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Flat-Earth economics.

Equality Bites

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

IF THERE IS one trend in American life that most irks economic conservatives, it is probably rising inequality. It's not the inequality itself that bothers them, as most will happily admit. It is the *perception* of inequality and, worse, the constant *discussion* of inequality that is so irritating. It offends their view of capitalism, helps justify all sorts of nefarious government interventions, and makes the conservative economic agenda (most of which tends to increase inequality) appear unfair. They would very much like for it not to be true. Failing that, they would like for the public not to believe that it's true—or, at the very least, not to be sure whether it is true or not. This is where Alan Reynolds comes in.

A manager at J.C. Penney who attended graduate school at night, Reynolds was plucked from obscurity by William F. Buckley in the 1960s after writing a few pieces for *The National Review*. (He's still "a couple of classes" short of his masters degree in economics.) He later went to the conservative Hudson Institute and from there made his way to the Cato Institute, where he is now a senior fellow. From this perch, and as a syndicated columnist, Reynolds offers up conventional supply-side economic views; but his specialty is denying that income inequality

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has grown. He has been at this task for almost two decades, and, as the economic consensus that inequality is increasing has grown stronger and stronger, so, too, has his importance to the right.

Reynolds's crucial role within the conservative movement was on full display at a packed-house Cato forum last week in which he defended a paper—titled "Has U.S. Income Inequality *Really* Increased?"—he published earlier this month and summarized in a much-discussed *Wall Street Journal* op-ed. Reynolds was introduced by Chris Edwards, the director of tax policy studies at Cato, who began by noting that it is a matter of opinion whether income inequality matters at all. (In his opinion, it doesn't.) Nonetheless, he suggested, "Economists and reporters need to be extremely careful in looking at trends in income statistics over time. All sources of income data have various quirks and shortcomings." In other words, conservatives aren't sure whether inequality is rising, and they don't really care if it is. Their primary concern is that newspapers treat the question as a matter of dispute rather than a settled fact.

If this sounds like the conservative stance on global warming or evolution, it shouldn't come as a surprise. Like those two issues, the existence of rising inequality is beyond dispute among academics who study it. This applies even to conservative economists with strong Republican pedigrees. (Harvard economist and former Reagan adviser Martin Feldstein: "There has no doubt been a relatively greater increase in higher incomes in recent years in the United States." Columbia's R. Glenn Hubbard, a Bush alum: "We have an issue with emerging inequality in the country.") And so the ambition of the conservative counterestablishment in these areas is not to overturn the scholarly consensus but simply to make the topic appear so complicated that laypeople and the press don't know what to believe.

And the science of measuring inequality, like most sciences, is subject to complicating details. The traditional method of measuring inequality has been to examine data from the Census Bureau. Unfortunately, census data isn't very good at detecting shifts among the uppermost slice of the very rich, because it has historically grouped high incomes into broad categories—say, over $999,999. So, in the last few years, economists Thomas Piketty of the École Normale Supérieure and Emmanuel Saez of the University of California, Berkeley, have started looking instead at tax returns, which have shown explosive income growth among the top 1 percent of tax-filers compared with everyone else. Last spring, they published a paper titled "The Evolution of Top Incomes: A Historical and International Perspective," which offered some startling findings: Since 1980, the share of income accruing to the highest-earning 1 percent of U.S. tax returns doubled, the share of the top one-tenth of 1 percent tripled, and the share of the top one-hundredth of 1 percent quadrupled. Their research was widely quoted in places like *The Economist* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Greg Mankiw, a former Bush economist, has called the study "very solid empirical work."

That was Reynolds's cue to spring into action. In his *Journal* op-ed, Reynolds lists a series of potential flaws in the Piketty-Saez data. Most of the complaints are simply picayune details. He writes, for instance, that "not everyone files a tax return, not all income is taxable (e.g., municipal bonds), and not every taxpayer tells the complete truth about his or her income." All these points are true enough. But is there any reason to think they would change the overall picture very much? Not really, unless you think undeclared earnings and municipal bonds are a huge and growing share of our income *and* that the rich are substantially less likely than the rest of us to cheat on their taxes or own municipal bonds.

And some of Reynolds's critiques are simply mistaken. For example, he argues that Piketty and Saez's data does not account for the massive rise of tax-sheltered pensions, such as 401(k) plans, which are "invisible in tax return data." Because 401(k) plans are now common among middle-class earners, tax returns miss a huge source of their wealth and thus make them look misleadingly poor. This sounds sensible enough, but it is wrong on several levels. 401(k)s didn't just appear out of nowhere; they mostly replaced defined benefit pensions. And, like the old pensions, 401(k)s *do* appear on tax returns when the accounts are withdrawn. On top of that, economists think most tax-favored assets are concentrated in the hands of the rich anyway, so, even if Reynolds were right about tax returns, it would very likely make inequality look even *worse*.

But whether the missing data would make inequality look worse or better is really beside the point. Reynolds's role is merely to point out that the data is imperfect. The skeptic challenging the expert consensus must be fluent enough in the language of the experts to nibble away at their data. (The evolution skeptic can find holes in the fossil record; the global-warming skeptic can find periods of global cooling.) But he need not—indeed, he *must* not—be fluent enough to assimilate all the data himself into a coherent alternative explanation. His point is that the truth is unknowable.

YOU MIGHT SUPPOSE that somebody in Reynolds's position would do everything he could to mask his own ideological preferences in order to lend credibility to his research. But Reynolds is completely up front about his beliefs, which are on display in the weekly op-ed columns he churns out. He is a libertarian conservative of the "taxation is theft" variety. "Aside from government subsidies and transfer payments, income is not 'distributed' at all," he wrote last year in a typical passage. "Most income is either earned or stolen. If some group's income was earned by legitimate means, then it is their income, not 'ours.' " (So, for instance, if a soldier loses his legs in battle and is forced to subsist on disability checks from the government, his income is *stolen*. If, on the other

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hand, a wealthy heir hires an economist to crank out tracts persuading the public to protect his fortune from taxation, that economist's income is *earned*.)

This is not a slip-up. Introducing ideology into a debate is one of the think-tank hack's strongest weapons. It demystifies a complicated issue, moving it from the realm of science into the realm of politics. The think-tank hack confesses he has his biases but then claims that his opponents in academia or government do, too. Evolution is the secularist science establishment's campaign to discredit religion; global warming is being pushed by regulators who would gain enormous power from new pollution controls; et cetera.

Since the goal is not winning these debates but merely achieving symmetry, the hack's most effective technique can be taking the accusation that would seem to apply to him and hurling it at his opponents. "The politically correct yet factually incorrect claim that the top 1 [percent] earns 16 [percent] of personal income appears to fill a psychological rather than logical need," Reynolds writes in the *Journal*. "Some economists seem ready and willing to supply whatever is demanded." So, while you might think Reynolds is a hack mining the data for results that would conform to his political preferences, he has already made the same charge against the other side. Who can tell who's right? ■

Mormon president? No problem.

Have Faith

BY RICHARD LYMAN BUSHMAN

MITT ROMNEY'S CANDIDACY for president has occasioned reams of speculation on how his Mormon faith would influence his conduct in the White House—some of it reminiscent of anxieties about John F. Kennedy's Catholicism that were prevalent in 1960. In a recent cover story for THE NEW REPUBLIC, Damon Linker, who once taught at Brigham Young University and presumably knows Mormonism well, argued that these fears are well-founded ("The Big Test," January 15). "[W]ould it not be accurate," Linker asked, "to say that, under a President Romney, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints would truly be in charge of the country—with its leadership having final say on matters of right and wrong?" According to Linker, Mormons believe their church presidents receive revelation from God; faithful Mormons have to comply with every directive from their prophet's mouth; and, therefore, to remain true to his religious beliefs, a President Romney would have to knuckle under to church leaders.

Linker's logic may sound straightforward, but, in fact, it has no grounding in reality. His concerns echo the controversy that greeted Mormon Church apostle Reed Smoot (he of the notorious Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act) when he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1903. Before eventually seating Smoot, a Senate committee debated his qualifications for nearly four years. To allay their fears, the senators repeatedly questioned church President Joseph F. Smith (nephew of the church's founder) about his control of Mormon politics. Over and over, he assured the committee that he had no intention of dictating Smoot's votes in the Senate—until, eventually, Theodore Roosevelt stepped in and swung the balance in Smoot's favor.

A century later, we can judge the actual dangers of the Mormon Church to national politics from the historical record. Have any of the church presidents tried to manage Smoot or other Mormon politicians like Harry Reid and Gordon Smith? The record is innocuous. Like other denominations, the church has taken stands on political issues it considers to be moral concerns, but it does not pressure politicians to close ranks as Mormons. In fact, it explicitly releases Mormon politicians from compliance with the church's political positions. According to the church's website, "Elected officials who are Latter-day Saints make their own decisions and may not necessarily be in agreement with one another or even with a publicly stated Church position. While the Church may communicate its views to them, as it may to any other elected official, it recognizes that these officials still must make their own choices based on their best judgment and with consideration of the constituencies whom they were elected to represent."

The current concern about Romney recalls anxieties about Mormons and Catholics from the nineteenth century, when both churches evoked suspicion. Critics thought of them as "fanatics," a stereotype applied to Catholics, Mormons, Masons, and Muslims. They feared that leaders of these groups would employ their spiritual authority over blindly loyal followers to magnify their own power. Any prophet claiming to speak for God, they reasoned, must necessarily try to impose his beliefs on everyone else. But this argument, while based on logic, was impervious to fact. The real-world actions of Mormons and Catholics, and their protestations of innocence, meant nothing.

Linker wants to separate Mormons from Catholics and make them a special case. The problem with Mormons, he believes, is the absence of any check on their president's authority. Catholics, he notes, at least have a long tradition of natural law, which a Catholic politician could call upon to resist an outlandish demand from Rome. If Mormons had this kind of reasoning in their background, "[t]his rationalist tradition could then be used to check the veracity of prophetic pronouncements." Without it, he claims, a Mormon politician has no choice but to bow to dictates from Salt Lake City.

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But this concern—rooted as it is in logic rather than reality—does not take into account how revelation actually works. In Mormonism and in biblical history, the prophetic tradition itself places heavy restraints on prophets. It makes a big difference that the moral law is enunciated repeatedly in Mormon scriptures. The Ten Commandments were restated in an early revelation, installing them as fundamentals of the church. Later, the saints were told that "no power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned." Could all this be overthrown by a new revelation? Linker thinks that revelation negates everything that came before, but this is not the case. The best analogy is to the courts and the Constitution. Theoretically, five Supreme Court justices can overturn any previous interpretation of the Constitution on a whim. But, in fact, they don't, and we know they can't. Their authority depends on reasoning outward from the Constitution and all previous decisions. The same is true for prophets. They work outward from the words of previous prophets, reinterpreting past prophecy for the present. That was certainly true for church founder Joseph Smith, whose most extreme revelation, plural marriage, was based on plural marriage in the Bible. Prophets do not write on a blank slate. Like Supreme Court justices, they would put their own authority in jeopardy if they disregarded the past.

Linker knows enough about Mormonism to speculate on the implications of the church's belief in the role of the United States in world history. Like Jonathan Edwards and many American Puritans, Smith thought this country had a special place in the events of the last days. Mormons believe the Christian gospel was restored in the United States and will spread to the rest of the world. They also believe that, when Christ returns, he will come to the United States and govern the world from here. Linker fears that these beliefs will cause church leaders to seek control of the United States in order to advance their premillennial plans. That is why he urges voters to ask Romney whether he thinks "that, when the Lord returns, he will rule over the world from the territory of the United States[.]" The implication, of course, is that Romney will be encouraged to pave the way for Christ's government. For Mormons, this line of thought is a phantasm. When Mormons speculate on the millennium, something they rarely do these days, they conjecture that many religions will flourish after the coming of Christ—a kind of American-style tolerance of all faiths, including non-Christian ones. Christ may rule, but not the Mormon Church. To turn Mormon belief into a plan for world domination reeks of all the other theories about secret groups planning to take over.

Beliefs do matter. Romney's values, as he has said repeatedly, come from his Mormonism. But teasing out the possible implications of theological positions can verge on fantasy. We should ask Romney what he believes, but it would be wrong to predict his future course as president from inferences having little to do with reality. ■

One town, one vote.

Little Big Man

BY DAVID MORTON

FRANKLIN B. THACKER JR. lives in a trailer a few miles outside Appalachia, a worn-out mountain town in the southwest corner of Virginia. Thacker, who is 40, isn't much for going out. He broke his neck ten years ago in a mining accident, and he spends his days living "bed to the couch." But, one day in January 2005, Thacker got himself a bulletproof vest. Not just any bulletproof vest, but a combat-model flak jacket—"eight times thicker" than the standard-issue police vest. He borrowed it from a friend who had returned from active duty in Iraq, and to test its reliability, Thacker wrapped the vest around a tree in his backyard and fired at it with a 9-mm semiautomatic pistol. He planned to use the vest for trips into town.

Appalachia (population 1,771 and falling) does not seem like a particularly dangerous place: a hardscrabble place, with its trailer homes clinging to mountainsides; a remote place, with the nearest bar ten miles down the road; but not the sort of place that requires donning a Baghdad-ready bulletproof jacket. The source of Thacker's anxiety was Appalachia's mayor, a heavy-set Air Force veteran named Ben Cooper. During his second mayoral term, Cooper consolidated power in Appalachia to the point that he personally controlled all town services and dominated the town council. Like a real-life Boss Hogg, he was de facto chief of the police department, and police officers harassed Cooper's enemies. Thacker was not the only one in Appalachia living in fear. The volunteer fire chief was constantly looking in his rearview mirror for trailing police cars. A former town councilor and her husband kept a journal of threats they had received and wondered if Cooper's Chevy Blazer would follow them up into the holler again. The former town manager figured it was best to just stay out of town altogether.

It didn't take much to earn a place on Cooper's list of enemies. Thacker made the mistake of angrily complaining to the mayor about a broken water main destroying the road outside his trailer. Three months later, an officer of the regional drug task force, allegedly at Cooper's request, led a team of Appalachia police officers on a raid of his home, where they spent three hours ransacking it before leaving with more than $1,000 in cash and a valuable collection of silver coins. Thacker wasn't arrested, but his water was shut off the next day.

Cooper's "reign of terror," as one former town coun-

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cilor calls it, lasted nearly two years and was made possible by one of the more brazen electoral fraud schemes in modern politics. In the run-up to his election in 2004, Cooper and at least nine conspirators targeted Inman Village—Appalachia's largest public housing complex—and the homes of elderly people, some of whom were suffering from Alzheimer's disease or blindness. They asked residents to fill out absentee registration forms, stole the ballots before they reached mailboxes, and then filled out the ballots themselves in favor of Cooper and two others on Cooper's council slate. There were some extra incentives for people to sign off on the registration forms: six-packs of beer, packs of cigarettes, and, in at least one case, a bag of pork rinds. The absentee ballot conspiracy and associated capers affected perhaps one-quarter of the total votes counted—and delivered Cooper and his allies the closely contested election. When investigators fully cracked the scheme, in March 2006, Cooper and his co-conspirators' actions resulted in 944 felony charges.

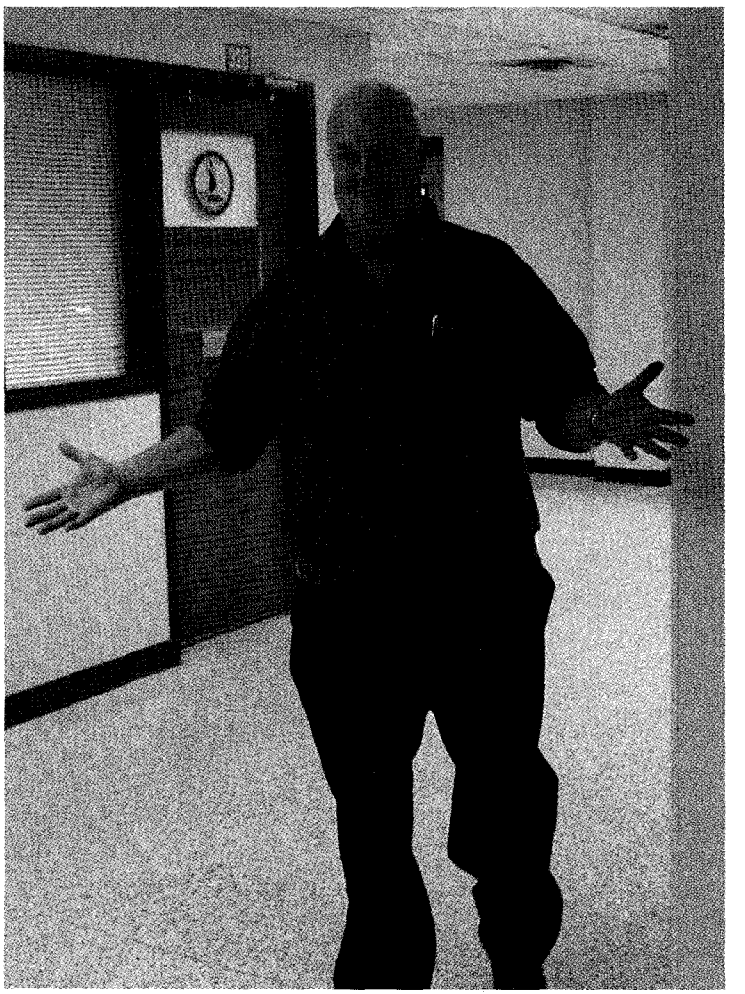
Throughout the country last year, in the tense lead-up to the midterm congressional elections, voter suspicions focused on touch-screen voting machines and their proven vulnerability to manipulation. But high-tech voting, for all the justified hand-wringing that accompanies it, has yet to generate a case of criminal fraud. Almost every time electoral fraud has been discovered and prosecuted, the source of subversion has been the low-tech absentee ballot. And the most common place for absentee ballot fraud to occur is in small towns and country-road jurisdictions: places like Greensboro, Alabama (population 2,616); Bath County, Kentucky (population 11,626); and Gate City, Virginia (population 2,072), a town just 30 miles from Appalachia, where in 2004 the mayor fixed enough absentee ballots to win reelection by a margin of two votes.

We sometimes like to imagine little town halls as the cradle of American democracy, ruled by consensus and fair-dealing. We know, though, that the lack of scrutiny and oversight in small towns like Appalachia can breed main-street megalomaniacs like Ben Cooper. Cooper used the absentee ballot, an innovation meant to expand the reach of democracy, to subvert it. And, because of Appalachia's isolation and small size, Cooper's power wasn't limited to a single city ward or counterbalanced by other political forces. Cooper didn't just steal the election—he stole Appalachia itself.

LAST DECEMBER, NINE months after Cooper was indicted, I drove down to Appalachia, which is wedged into the southern range of the Appalachian mountains near the Kentucky border. What most impresses a first-time visitor is the coal. For several years, the region has been riding what one young miner told me was Virginia's "last big coal boom," and the nonstop traffic of big-rig coal haulers along Main Street is the principal feature of downtown. With every breath, I could taste the bituminous clouds the trucks leave behind. Black dust seeped under the doors and collected on storefronts and under roof eaves, forming permanent shadows.

There's not a lot of wealth coming through town with the coal trucks. Even with the recent coal spike, the mines employ only a fraction of the workers they did in the past. Most people live in small homes or trailers angled off the steep mountain slopes that squeeze the town on every side. The supermarket at the east end of Main Street is Appalachia's center of activity. Nearby is a small park dedicated to local miners, with crosses engraved next to the names of six men who were killed on the job. At the west end of Main Street are the giant empty silos of an abandoned deep mine, and across from the mine are two convenience stores—the only places to sit at a tabletop and chat over a cup of coffee. There are no longer any restaurants in Appalachia or any bars. There was never a public library. The most prominent building downtown, by far, is an eight-story former luxury hotel converted years ago into an apartment tower for senior citizens.

Ben Cooper, the Boss Hogg of Appalachia, Virginia.



ANDRE TEAGUE

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Cooper, who is 64, lives in Old Bottom, a neighborhood of closely bunched bungalows that is considered Appalachia's upscale district. When Appalachia was the commercial hub for the company-owned coal camps in the area, this was where the professional class built their homes, just across the railroad tracks from Main Street. Cooper lives with his elderly mother in the same white cottage he grew up in, on the same street where, as a boy, he used to shoot out the streetlights. Cooper's father owned a hardware store and was a town magistrate, a man of some standing back when Appalachia was still a town of some importance. But, by the time Cooper retired to Appalachia in the late '90s after a career in the Air Force, the town had shrunk to less than half its size. The local economy no longer functioned on coal's boom-and-bust cycles but rather the steady, predictable flow of pension checks and disability payments. Drug abuse, specifically of prescription painkillers like OxyContin, was common, and Wise County's suicide rate was twice the state average. For someone like Cooper, with an excess of time and a lofty sense of himself, Appalachia didn't offer many paths to prominence. There was, however, Town Hall.

Government responsibilities in Appalachia are more or less limited to water, sewers, some road repair, a seven-man police force, and a public swimming pool. It's a simple, $1 million operation, essentially the size of a mom-and-pop business. Around the time Cooper came back to town, scandal hit Appalachia. The IRS was hounding Town Hall about unpaid employee taxes, and the chief of police was charged with embezzling from the police coffee fund. Into the mire stepped Cooper. Fashioning himself Appalachia's loudest citizen watchdog, he appeared at every monthly meeting of the town council, shouting for police overtime schedules and the details of town contracts, and inundating the town offices with record requests. In 2000, Cooper's zeal won him election to the five-person council. A council majority selected him mayor, a mostly ceremonial post that paid $50 per month.

LAST YEAR WAS, all in all, a humiliating time for Appalachia. Headlines about the pork-rind election became punch lines on Jay Leno and the "John Boy & Billy" radio show. When I stopped by his house, Cooper wouldn't talk to me; but, perhaps because of the embarrassment he brought to the town, I found that people in Appalachia were eager to talk about him. The first thing they tended to mention was how he thought he was better than everyone else—how, when there had been a restaurant in town, Cooper would sit at a table, stretch his legs into the aisle, fold his hands over his stomach, and chew on a toothpick, perfectly relaxed, "as if he has control over wherever his presence is," as one person who campaigned for him put it.

Cooper liked playing boss. "He said, 'Unless you play ball with me, I'll cut your f'in' legs off,' " says Gary Bush, Cooper's predecessor as mayor. Cooper had himself appointed acting town manager, which put him in charge of the government's day-to-day operations. Police officers were ordered to file their reports in military time. He would personally respond to emergency calls, whatever the hour, and he would often arrive on the scene before the police or the fire trucks did. Cooper also preferred to do road repair jobs himself. Once, operating a backhoe in the Little League baseball field, he accidentally pulled up some telephone wires. People told me he didn't seem to relish the work. It was like he was afflicted with municipal obsessive-compulsive disorder, driven by the angry conviction that, in all of Appalachia, only he was up to the task of doing things right. Cooper's mania for control carried a whiff of the bare-knuckled authority that a lot of people in Appalachia had known before, which, no doubt, reassured some. In the old days, the coal companies set the pace of everyday life in Appalachia, and not much happened without their say-so. Still, some people, like the former volunteer fire chief, Robert Anderson Sr., were disturbed by Cooper's reach. "He wanted full control of the town and everything that worked in it," Anderson told me.

The reason that Cooper tailed the fire trucks, for instance, wasn't to lend a helping hand. The volunteer fire department is officially independent of the town; Cooper wanted it to submit to his authority. At the scenes of fires, he stalked around with a digital camera, hoping to catch someone screwing up, evidence that might one day form the basis of a lawsuit. Only when the fire department took him to court did Cooper finally give up the chase. State police would later discover at Cooper's house surveillance photos of firemen going about their everyday business.

In Appalachia politics, power is fleeting. It only takes a one-vote shift in the five-seat council to lose a governing majority, and, in 2002, although his own seat hadn't been up for election, Cooper was back to being a lowly town councilor. There was no clear issue in the race that year, although Cooper's refusal to find someone other than himself to be town manager might have had something to do with it. Bush was mayor again, and the reconstituted council selected a new town manager, a brusque man named Vern Haefele. But, after almost two years running the town, Haefele began to get on some people's nerves. Cooper saw an opportunity and launched his 2004 mayoral campaign.

Unpopular as the town manager might have been among some folks, Cooper himself had only won his council seat by two votes four years earlier. This time around, if he were to ensure victory over Bush's slate of candidates, he would need an extra boost. Conspirators for the absentee ballot scheme weren't hard to find. There was an ex–police officer who was promised he would be police chief in a second Cooper regime. There was Dude Sharrett, the town parks and recreation manager, and his wife, Belinda, the town bookkeeper, both of whom stood to lose their jobs under Bush and Haefele—jobs that paid little more than minimum wage. Cooper allegedly promised Sharrett's brothers, Boogie and Kevin, police cover for their illegal trade in pre-

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scription painkillers. Sharrett's son Andy, a sometime contract postman, was put on Cooper's slate. Cooper's own brother was the town postmaster, with easy access to mailed absentee ballots, but prosecutors say they have no evidence of his involvement.

Although the absentee scheme took place in advance of the vote, the conspirators were busy on Election Day, too. A van collected residents from Inman Village, voters were promised free grocery items and drugs and booze, and then they were shuttled to Appalachia's recreation center, the town's only polling site. Once there, a Cooper operative illegally stationed inside the building escorted voters to a booth and either instructed them on how to vote or simply voted in their place.

Three council seats were up for grabs. Cooper's slate took all three. Once again, he had his council majority. While it is difficult to determine with precision exactly how many votes were tainted, 108 out of 585 total ballots cast were absentee, more than three times the expected number. About 80 of those were clearly fraudulent or suspicious, says Tim McAfee, one of the special prosecutors on the case. A switch of just 35 votes would have been enough to prevent Cooper from becoming mayor.

ROBUST DEMOCRACIES HAVE checks and balances, hearings and investigations, and sometimes a Woodward and Bernstein. In Appalachia, oversight amounted to Cooper's two buddies on the council. With their support, he was once again mayor, once again acting town manager, and his interim appointment was effectively permanent.

In his new role as town tyrant, Cooper immediately set out to purge his enemies. Police began tailing the family of Anderson, the volunteer fire chief. "The police was going by your house, the mayor was going by your house," recalls Anderson. "You stop your car, they stop their car. You go to the grocery store, they wait in the parking lot for you." Anderson himself was arrested one night at his home for violating the town's leash law. Former town councilor Rick Bowman, one of those whom the police would follow, had his tires slashed. Cooper also served as his own one-man KGB—touring around town in his truck with night-vision goggles and shotgun microphones attached to the dashboard. One night, another former town councilor caught him parked in the road below her house, staring up toward it with binoculars.

It took almost two years for the election plot to fully unravel. Just before the vote, a woman who lived in Inman Village complained to county officials after one of the Sharretts told her that her ballot already had been taken care of—even though she hadn't voted. *The Roanoke Times* discovered more instances like hers in Inman, and, almost 18 months after the election, a county judge handed the case to special prosecutors. Only then did investigators examine all the absentee ballots from the election side by side. They discovered that not only were many of the ballots filled out in red ink, but many of them also appeared to be filled out in the same hand.

A search of Cooper's house turned up detailed, annotated voter lists, allegedly the blueprints of the conspiracy. "I can't believe he kept this stuff," says McAfee, the special prosecutor. On November 30, in the Wise County courthouse, Cooper pleaded guilty or no contest to 243 felony charges related to electoral fraud. He is scheduled to be sentenced on January 18, when he faces a possible 21 years in prison. Avoiding trial was probably wise. During the October trial of one of his alleged co-conspirators, the jury was presented a photo of Cooper juxtaposed with an image of Boss Hogg. The idea was to highlight the similarities.

Cooper had trouble letting go of power. When the indictments came down in March, he resigned as acting town manager, but he waited three months to quit as mayor and town councilor. For several months, it was as if no one was running the town. The impact of Cooper's absence was particularly visible on Main Street, which was not being regularly cleaned. Coal dust mixed with mud and then congealed into a black froth that rose to the curbs. It then hardened like concrete.

APPALACHIA'S NEW MAYOR is Eddie Gollaway. I bumped into him one afternoon at Town Hall. Gollaway is a squat 51-year-old trucker and mechanic; he was dropping by after a day at the garage and was wearing a camouflage cap and a greasy blue work shirt. The election business is shameful, he told me. For that, he mostly blames the Sharretts and the people in Inman Village who received the small bribes. "The lower class can be better," he said, "but they don't want to."

Gollaway was more forgiving of Cooper himself. "Ben, in his own way, was a good person, but something went wrong somewhere," he said. Appalachia's current town manager, Fred Luntsford, didn't want to talk about Cooper because he counts him as a friend; whenever he mentioned to me the chaos of the previous regime, he referred to "the leadership." Affection for Cooper was more common than I expected. In the context of Appalachia, Cooper's behavior went too far. But it wasn't outrageous.

Prosecutors cleared Gollaway of wrongdoing in the election scheme; he is, in fact, the only councilor from Cooper's slate who wasn't indicted. He does, however, confess to feeling guilty by association. Last spring, to remove the taint from his reputation and to prove his dedication to the town, Gollaway came up with a scheme of his own. He borrowed a pressure washer from the county, repaired it at his garage, and then headed to Main Street. Gollaway thought the encrusted coal dust that had piled up after Cooper left office made it look like a slum.

"I operated that truck, my friend," Gollaway says. "One night I spent 18 hours out here nonstop, just washing and washing and washing. This went on several weeks until we made Appalachia's downtown spotless. Pure and simply spotless." ■

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The return of Al Qaeda.
Where You Bin?

BY PETER BERGEN

OSAMA BIN LADEN will turn 50 this year. But, when we picture him today, most Westerners imagine a man who, addled physically by disease and psychologically by the repeated blows the United States has dealt his cause, looks much older than his age: a gaunt figure limping from cave to cave along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, one step ahead of U.S. forces—surrounded, perhaps, by a small group of loyalists but cut off from the rest of the world, his once formidable ability to mastermind dramatic acts of violence now rendered nearly nonexistent.

As for Al Qaeda, the terrorist group bin Laden founded nearly two decades ago, Americans have been told that it, too, is unhealthy, isolated, and in decline. A National Intelligence Estimate declassified in September 2006 opens with the observation that "United States–led counterterrorism efforts have seriously damaged the leadership of [Al Qaeda] and disrupted its operations." At a press conference the next month, President Bush affirmed, "Absolutely, we're winning. Al Qaeda is on the run." American officials aren't the only ones who believe this. In July 2005, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf told reporters that "Al Qaeda does not exist in Pakistan anymore." More recently, *Newsweek*'s Fareed Zakaria opined that "Al Qaeda Central ... appears to have turned into a communications company. It's capable of producing the occasional jihadist cassette, but not actual jihad." In Washington, the consensus view is that, while Bush's foreign policy has been an overall disaster, he still can lay claim to one key achievement: severely weakening Al Qaeda in the five years since September 11.

There was a time when that was true. In the months and years immediately following the Taliban's ouster, Al Qaeda lost its main sanctuary and struggled to regroup in the largely lawless zone along Afghanistan's border with Pakistan. Key leaders were captured or killed. Years passed during which the group mounted few major attacks.

But, today, from Algeria to Afghanistan, from Britain to Baghdad, the organization once believed to be on the verge of impotence is again ascendant. Attacks by jihadists have reached epidemic levels in the past three years, with terrorists carrying out dramatic operations in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005, as well as multiple suicide attacks across the Middle East and Asia—not only in Iraq, but also in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, and Indonesia. Meanwhile, jihadists have made inroads in the horn of Africa; the Taliban's efforts to turn Afghanistan back into a failed state appear to be succeeding; and Al Qaeda's Iraqi branch recently declared sovereignty over the country's vast Anbar province.

Still, many have clung to the view that Al Qaeda remains a shell of its former self. They argue, as Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte did last April, that Al Qaeda, "a somewhat weakened organization," is "more in the mode of serving as an inspiration for some of these terroristically inclined groups elsewhere." *Newsweek*'s Zakaria echoed this analysis. "Al Qaeda Central," he wrote last year, "no longer has much to do with the specific terrorist attacks—even the most bloody ones, in Madrid, Sinai and London—that have taken place in the past three years. These appear to be the work of smaller, local groups, often inspired by Al Qaeda but not directed by it."

Certainly, there are plenty of examples of freelance terrorists acting in Al Qaeda's name—such as the seven men arrested in Miami last summer who allegedly plotted to blow up federal buildings in Florida. But the existence of Al Qaeda imitators does not prove the obsolescence of the real thing. Far from it: There is considerable evidence that, over the last few years, Al Qaeda has managed to regroup; and there is reason to believe that, over the next few years, it will grow stronger still. More than at any time since September 11, Osama bin Laden's deadly outfit is back in business.

THE STORY OF Al Qaeda's renaissance begins with its eviction from Afghanistan in late 2001. Unfortunately, the group didn't disintegrate—it merely moved across the border to the tribal regions of western Pakistan, where today it operates a network of training camps. A former American intelligence official stationed in Pakistan told me that there are currently more than 2,000 foreign fighters in the region. The camps are relatively modest in size. "People want to see barracks. [In fact,] the camps use dry riverbeds for shooting and are housed in compounds for 20 people, where they are taught calisthenics and bomb-making," a senior American military intelligence official explains. The existence of these camps bodes well for Al Qaeda, since terrorist plots have a much higher chance of success if some of the cell's members have received personal training in bomb-making and terrorist tradecraft rather than merely reading about such matters on the Internet—as many freelance terrorists have done. Just as it would be absurd to argue that U.S. troops could be trained over the Internet instead of

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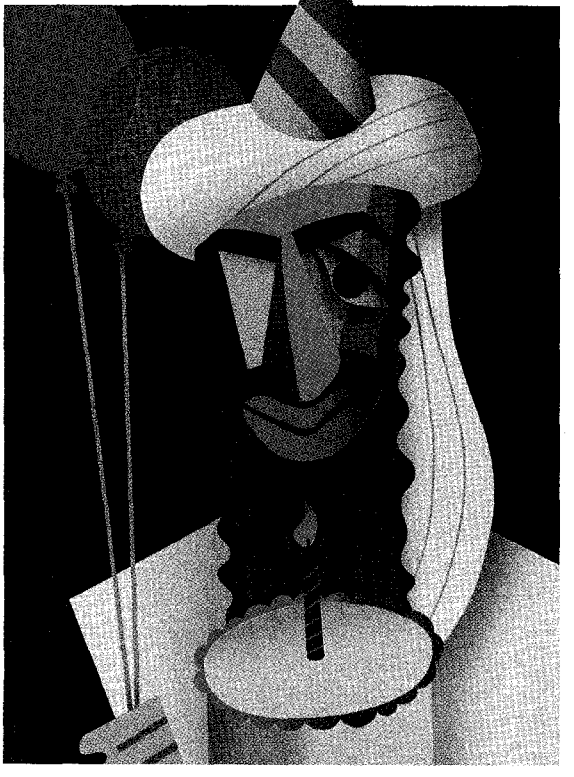
at boot camp, so, too, it turns out that effective terrorists need to have attended terrorist training facilities.

The tribal areas of Pakistan have proved to be a comfortable home for Al Qaeda—and that isn't going to change. The Pakistani government has already concluded peace agreements with local militants (but not, obviously, Al Qaeda) in two of the seven federally administered tribal areas along the Afghan border, and it is likely to reach additional peace deals this year. That means the Pakistani army will gradually pull out of these areas, which can only help Al Qaeda.

Meanwhile, on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the Taliban has staged a comeback while virtually merging with Al Qaeda. The Taliban were a provincial bunch when they held power in Afghanistan, but, in the past couple of years, they have increasingly identified as part of the global jihadist movement, their rhetoric full of references to Iraq and Palestine in a manner that mirrors bin Laden's public statements. Mullah Dadullah, a key Taliban commander, gave an interview to CBS last month in which he outlined how the Taliban and Al Qaeda cooperate: "Osama bin Laden, thank God, is alive and in good health. We are in contact with his top aides and sharing plans and operations with each other." Indeed, the senior American military intelligence official told me that "trying to separate Taliban and Al Qaeda in Pakistan serves no purpose. It's like picking gray hairs out of your head." Suicide attacks, improvised explosive devices, and beheadings of hostages—all techniques Al Qaeda perfected in Iraq—are being employed by the Taliban to strengthen their influence in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan. Hekmat Karzai, an Afghan security expert, points out that suicide bombings were virtually unknown in Afghanistan until 2005, when there were 21 attacks; last year, there were 118. In May, maverick Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a one-time opponent of the Taliban, declared his allegiance to Al Qaeda. Having reorganized across the border in Pakistan, bin Laden's group is now on the rise in Afghanistan—again.



NOWHERE IN THE West do these developments pose a greater danger than in Great Britain. A British government report published last year explains that Mohammed Siddique Khan, the ringleader of the 2005 London bombings that killed 52 commuters, visited Pakistan on two occasions in 2003 and 2004 and "had some contact with Al Qaeda figures [and] some relevant training in a remote part of Pakistan." Two months after the attacks, Al Jazeera aired a videotape of Khan saying, "I'm going to talk to you in a language that you understand. Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood." The tape bore the distinctive logo of As Sahab ("The Clouds"), the TV production arm of Al Qaeda. Khan's appearance on the As Sahab videotape suggests that he met members of Al Qaeda's media team, who are based on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. On the same tape, Al Qaeda's number two, Ayman Al Zawahiri, directly acknowledged his group's involvement in the London bombings.

The nexus between Al Qaeda, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the United Kingdom is almost certain to generate more attacks. Making a rare public speech last November, Eliza Manningham-Buller, the head of Britain's domestic intelligence service, MI5, said, "We are aware of numerous plots to kill people and damage our economy . . . 30 that we know of. These plots often have linked back to Al Qaeda in Pakistan, and, through these links, Al Qaeda gives guidance and training to its largely British foot soldiers here on an extensive and growing scale." One such plot involving Al Qaeda was the alleged plan by a group of British-Pakistani citizens to launch an attack in the United Kingdom using 1,300 pounds of fertilizer (reportedly stored in a locker in West London). They were arrested in March 2004 by British police. According to court documents entered in the trial, two of the accused said they worked for Abdul Hadi, a senior leader of Al Qaeda. Also, the British government alleges that several of those arrested had trained at terrorist camps in the tribal areas of Pakistan along the Afghanistan border in 2003.

The Al Qaeda threat to Britain is not only a domestic problem for the British; it is also a major security headache for the United States. In July 2004, following the arrest in Pakistan of accused Al Qaeda computer expert Mohammed Noor Khan, British police arrested eight men—many of them British citizens—for their alleged involvement in an operation to attack U.S. financial landmarks like the New York Stock Exchange and the IMF headquarters in Washington, D.C. And the alleged plans by a group of British citizens to blow up as many as ten U.S. passenger jets with liquid explosives that was broken up in the United Kingdom last August was a "top down" Al Qaeda operation, I was told by a veteran American counterterrorism

DAVID COWLES

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official. That analysis was seconded by Lieutenant General Michael Maples, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), who, earlier this month, publicly said the plot was "directed by Al Qaeda leadership in Pakistan."

Al Qaeda's resurgence is being felt elsewhere, too. A violent Algerian organization named the Group for Call and Combat (and known by its French initials, GSPC) announced last year that it was placing itself under the Al Qaeda umbrella. In September, GSPC leader Abu Musab Abdul Wadud explained that "the organization of Al Qaeda of Jihad is the only organization qualified to gather together the mujahideen." Subsequently, in December, the GSPC attacked a group of oil workers employed by a Halliburton subsidiary in Algeria, killing one and injuring nine. Also in December, Jean-Louis Bruguière, the leading French counterterrorism investigator, told *The International Herald Tribune* that France had become "the main target" of the GSPC and that the risk of attacks had increased recently: "We consider the threat level to be very high. ... What is new is that this organization has formally pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda."

And then, of course, there is Iraq. Several studies have shown that the suicide attackers in Iraq are largely foreigners, while only a small proportion are Iraqi. In June 2005, the SITE Institute of Washington found, by tracking both jihadist websites and news reports, that, of the 199 Sunni extremists who had died in Iraq either in suicide attacks or in action against coalition or Iraqi forces, 104 were from Saudi Arabia and only 17 were from Iraq. And the University of Missouri's Mohammed Hafez, in a study of the 101 known suicide bombers in Iraq from March 2003 to February 2006, found that, while 44 were Saudi (and eight were from Italy!), only seven were from Iraq. Most of these foreign suicide attackers are affiliated with Al Qaeda in Iraq, which the DIA judges to be "the largest and most active of the Iraq-based terrorist groups." Meanwhile, a classified U.S. Marine assessment of the situation in Anbar province—obtained by *The Washington Post* in November 2006—states that Al Qaeda surpasses all other groups "in its ability to control the day-to-day life of the average Sunni" and is an "integral part of the social fabric of western Iraq." No wonder the organization felt emboldened to recently declare an Islamist emirate in Anbar province.

YET ANOTHER INDICATOR of Al Qaeda's renewed vitality lies in its growing propaganda operation. Al Qaeda has long understood that propaganda is one of the keys to its success; as bin Laden explained in a letter to Taliban leader Mullah Omar sometime before the September 11 attacks, as much as "90 percent of the total preparation for the battles" is conducted in the media. As Sahab debuted its first major project on the Internet in the summer of 2001. Since then, As Sahab has continued to release statements from Al Qaeda's leaders—and has significantly increased its output in the last year. IntelCenter, a Virginia-based company that tracks statements by jihadists, calculates that As Sahab produced 58 videotapes in 2006, more than tripling its 2005 output. As Sahab's videos are reasonably polished productions, with English subtitles, animation effects, and studio settings. Its production operation probably does not have a fixed studio location but likely consists of a number of cameramen, as well as editors using programs like Final Cut Pro on laptops.

The material As Sahab is producing in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not merely talking-head propaganda. On a videotape produced in April 2006, As Sahab documented three separate IED attacks against American convoys in Kunar province in eastern Afghanistan. The film is well-shot, first showing militants mixing the explosives for the IEDs and molding them into devices with detonators, then documenting the attacks themselves. After explosions devastate the Humvees, the cameraman continues to film, showing U.S. Army medevac helicopters arriving to evacuate the dead and wounded.

As Sahab also released more than 20 audiotapes and videotapes by bin Laden and Zawahiri in 2006, neither of whom seem too hassled by the global war on terrorism, given the volume of their output. Bin Laden may not be calling people on a satellite phone to order attacks, but he remains in broad ideological and strategic control of his followers, in some cases using the tapes to issue general direction to militants. For instance, on October 19, 2003, bin Laden called for action against Spain because of its troop presence in Iraq. Six months later, terrorists killed 191 commuters in Madrid. (According to American intelligence officials, it now appears that Al Qaeda had a much greater role in the Madrid attacks than was generally understood in the immediate aftermath of the bombings.) In the spring of 2004, bin Laden offered a truce to European countries willing to pull out of the coalition in Iraq. Almost exactly a year after his truce offer expired, on July 7, 2005, an Al Qaeda–directed cell carried out the bombings on London's transportation system. In December 2004, bin Laden called for attacks on Saudi oil facilities; and, in February 2006, Al Qaeda attacked the Abqaiq plant in Saudi Arabia, arguably the most important oil-production facility in the world. The operation was a failure, but the message was clear: When bin Laden speaks, his followers still listen—and act.

TO BE SURE, while Al Qaeda is resurgent now, the long term is likely to be a very different story. The organization has several strategic weaknesses that should allow the United States and its allies to eventually gain the upper hand. First, it has killed a lot of Muslims. This is doubly problematic for Al Qaeda, as the Koran forbids killing both civilians *and* fellow Muslims. Al Qaeda lost a great deal of support in Saudi Arabia after its campaign of attacks in 2003 that killed mostly Saudis, and the same effect can be seen in Indonesia, where Jemaah Islamiyah, the local Al Qaeda affiliate, has killed mostly Indonesians in its attacks over the last three years. Popular revulsion also followed Al Qaeda's 2005 attacks against three U.S.-owned hotels in Amman,

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Jordan, which killed mostly Jordanians.

Second, while bin Laden enjoys personal popularity in much of the Muslim world, this popularity does not translate into mass support for Al Qaeda—the kind of mass support that, say, Hezbollah enjoys in Lebanon. This is not surprising, since there are no Al Qaeda social welfare services, schools, hospitals, or clinics. Even Al Qaeda's leaders are aware of this problem: In a 2005 letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi, Al Qaeda's number two urged the terrorist leader in Iraq to prepare for U.S. withdrawal from the country by not making the same mistakes as the Taliban, which alienated the masses in Afghanistan.

Third, Al Qaeda's leaders have constantly expanded their list of enemies, to the point where it now includes all Middle Eastern regimes; Muslims who don't share their views; most Western countries; Jews and Christians; the governments of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Russia; most news organizations; the United Nations; and international NGOs. It's very hard to think of a category of person, institution, or government that Al Qaeda does not oppose. Making a world of enemies is never a winning strategy.

Finally, we know what bin Laden is against; but what is he really for? If you asked him, he would say the restoration of the caliphate. For bin Laden, that doesn't mean the return of something like the Ottoman Empire, but rather the installation of Taliban-style theocracies stretching from Indonesia to Morocco. A silent majority of Muslims don't want that. A 2003 poll conducted in Saudi Arabia, perhaps the world's most conservative Muslim country, makes this abundantly clear: In that survey, 49 percent of Saudis said they admired bin Laden, but only 5 percent wanted to live in a bin Laden–run state. Many Muslims like bin Laden because he "stands up" to the West. That doesn't mean they would actually want to live under the Taliban.

Al Qaeda's strategic weaknesses have already led to declining support both for bin Laden and for terrorist attacks against civilians in a number of Muslim countries. But, while these long-term weaknesses will damage Al Qaeda over time, they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the group over the next few years because Al Qaeda is drawing energy, support, and new recruits from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan—conflicts that are likely to go on, in one form or another, for quite a while. In a study of 90 insurgencies fought around the world since World War I, Seth Jones of the RAND Corporation found that it took an average of 14 years for governments to defeat insurgencies and an average of eleven years for insurgents to topple governments. Either way, we are in for protracted conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result, even though the group faces long-term problems, Al Qaeda can do plenty of damage in the years to come.

WHAT WILL THAT damage look like? Certainly, Al Qaeda will continue its post–September 11 campaign of attacking "soft" Western targets around the world, particularly U.S.-owned hotels and oil facilities important to the U.S. economy, as well as Israeli and Jewish targets outside of Israel. It will also remain a destabilizing force in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. For the moment, Al Qaeda is finding it difficult to attack the United States, thanks to the rejection of its ideology by the American Muslim community and security measures taken by the U.S. government. But all bets are off once the war in Iraq winds down and the foreign fighters there, and some of their Iraqi colleagues, turn their sights on the United States. The resulting blowback from the Iraq war could make the blowback from the Afghan war against the Soviets look like high tea at the Four Seasons.

There are two tactics that a resurgent Al Qaeda could easily deploy in the next few years that would have significant detrimental effects on U.S. interests. Neither has been successfully used before—but both are well within the organization's capability; unlike the threat of Al Qaeda detonating a nuclear device, they do not represent Chicken Little scenarios. The first such tactic is the use of rocket-propelled grenades or surface-to-air missiles to bring down a commercial jetliner. Al Qaeda already tried such an attack against an Israeli passenger jet in Kenya in 2002. That attempt almost succeeded. If Al Qaeda manages to down a commercial plane anywhere in the world, it would have a devastating impact on both global aviation and tourism.

The second scenario is the detonation of a radiological bomb, most likely in a European city—which would cause widespread panic by leading many to believe that terrorists had "gone nuclear," even though a radiological bomb is nothing like a nuclear device. In June 2004, a report in *New Scientist* magazine, based on records from the International Atomic Energy Agency, indicated that the risk of a radiological bomb attack is growing. In 1996, there were eight incidents of smuggling radioactive materials suitable for such a device; in 2003, there were 51 such cases. The dramatic rise in smuggling has coincided with efforts by Al Qaeda to acquire radioactive materials. A dirty-bomb attack in a Western city would kill relatively few people but would engender enormous panic and severely damage global investor confidence.

Thanks to the safe havens that exist today for Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, such attacks are a real possibility. These are not the ideal havens that the organization enjoyed in Sudan or Afghanistan before September 11, but they are sufficient for the group's leaders to run small training facilities and to reorganize—which is exactly what they have done. Belatedly, American officials are beginning to acknowledge this. Earlier this month, testifying before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Negroponte observed that "Al Qaeda's core elements are resilient," while FBI Director Robert Mueller noted that "the group has been able to rebuild itself and remain viable—finding new staging grounds for attacks." Far from being on the defensive, Al Qaeda is once again on the move. As bin Laden turns 50 this year, he has much to celebrate. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Matters of Fate

IN THE OTHERWISE BRILLIANT opening sequence of *Saving Private Ryan*, dramatizing the American landings in France on D-day, Steven Spielberg made one small slip. He completely engulfs the viewer in the American assault; but when we are thus immersed, he inserts a brief clip of German machine-gunners firing at the Americans. This complete switch in view cracks our involvement. It takes a few seconds to become American-absorbed again.

LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA
(Warner Bros.)

VENUS
(Miramax)

Knowingly or not, Clint Eastwood has converted the Spielberg slip into a triumph. He made *Flags of Our Fathers*, about the American invasion of Iwo Jima, completely from the American view, and now he has made an entire film about the reverse view, the Japanese resistance. (Spielberg was coproducer of both films and possibly contributed, out of his own experience, to Eastwood's decision.) Instead of slipping one glimpse of the enemy opposition into *Flags*, Eastwood made **LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA**, which is devoted to the Japanese actions and states of mind as thoroughly as the first film was to the American forces. The only Americans in this second film are a few prisoners.

The double result is a unique achievement. The only remotely comparable work I know is *The Human Condition* (1961), Masaki Kobayashi's trio of films about continuing experiences in war, but to my knowledge no previous set of pictures showed both sides of a conflict: war as the collision of two humanized groups, each group trained to kill the other group. Eastwood's basic purpose could have been nothing other than to show that these two groups, in their very opposition, reveal their basic linkage. (I note again that this intent is remarkable for a director-star who made a career out of bravura killing, and I note again also that these two films, made almost simultaneously, are the work of a seventy-five-year-old man.)

Letters was written by Iris Yamashita and is based on a book by Tsuyoko Yoshido and the Japanese commander General Tadamichi Kuribayashi. The film begins with some modern Japanese investigators digging up a bag on Iwo Jima, and it ends with the opening of that bag, which is full of letters from Japanese soldiers that were never sent. The substance of the film is the activities of the soldiers who wrote those letters, including the general. They all know that the Americans are coming. They know that their task is to defend this island, which is considered holy ground, part of Japan itself, and would be used as a base for bombing their homeland. They know that they will be outmanned and outgunned. They know that they are there in order to die in Japan's defense.

Steeped thus in an ethos quite unlike that of their enemy, whose purpose is to conquer and survive if possible, it is poignant that, among the Japanese, many of the jokes, quarrels, and palships are much like those of soldiers with whom we are more familiar. As they bicker and play their pranks and gab, these men dig their tunnels in the rocky hills, prepare trenches and gun emplacements, and know that, when the Americans arrive, they cannot have any victory except the glory of dying for their country. Those who question this aim suffer for it. All their preparations and all the reminders of their heroic privilege, all the terrible combat of the invasion, are superintended by the general, nobly yet warmly played by Ken Watanabe (who was the leading Japanese actor in *The Last Samurai*).

The actors are intelligently directed by Eastwood, which is especially notable because they speak a language he doesn't know. This is a completely subtitled picture made by an American. The film is virtually all in black-and-white, even the occasional flashbacks to other places, including California, where the general once was stationed. Overall, the effect is presumably what Eastwood wanted: we are present at a momentous event, not watching a movie.

Surely the future will bring joint showings of *Flags* and *Letters*. These showings will confirm that Eastwood, who became world-famous with popular films (and in my view was overpraised for such "serious" pictures as *Unforgiven* and *Mystic River*), has now contributed to the treasury of world film. These two Iwo Jima pictures ultimately disclose a theme more stark than the faintly smug pathos of antiwar films. Eastwood's films concede war as an ancient and permanent curse.

On the other hand—a considerably different hand—**VENUS** is melancholy but enjoyable. Melancholy itself is often a species of pleasure when it is grounded in comprehensible regret. Hanif Kureishi does the job. He has written a screenplay about an aging English actor, once famous and handsome, who is now less famous and weather-beaten—whiskey-beaten, rather—who still acts a bit and drinks a lot and is a walking monument of waste. It was directed by Roger Michell, who filmed another good Kureishi screenplay, *The Mother*. Possibly both writer and director knew from the start who would play the actor: in any case the role is perfectly cast, and the melancholy is complete.

Peter O'Toole, now in his mid-seventies and still superb in large lovely ways, is in the role, which is not autobiographical but which he understands only too well. Maurice, the actor, lives in London, modestly but not in poverty, and drinks around with another old actor, Ian (Leslie Phillips). Ian has a young grandniece, Jessie (Jodie Whittaker), who comes to London to be a model and is so difficult and so attractive that Maurice takes her under his tremulous wing. Sex, facts being what they are, is out of the

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question. A sort of sexless, amusing, argumentative, and eventually affectionate relationship develops between the old actor, a figure of a bygone age, and the girl, so cutting-edge that she can slice.

Maurice does some film acting now and again, and Jessie gets some work as a nude model in an art school. Other plotty matters unwind, mildly. More engrossing are the performances, including the appearances of Valerie, Maurice's wife, who has long lived apart from him but is still fond of him. She is played by Vanessa Redgrave, marvelously true from her first moment.

A melancholy deeper than the story's comes along with O'Toole. The adjective "great" is one of the cheapest in film and theater criticism; yet, to use it as seriously as possible, O'Toole showed early on, in *Lawrence of Arabia*, of course, and *Brotherly Love* and *The Ruling Class*, that he could become one of the great actors in history. But, like John Barrymore, he did not have the character to match his talent. His career wobbled. Vanessa Redgrave did have the requisite character and has achieved greatness. Her moments with O'Toole in this film thus have their particular melancholy. ■

DAVID HAJDU ON MUSIC

Ye Olde Rocker

ROCK AND ROLLERS, AS they age, sometimes find themselves outgrowing a music they cannot outlive. Rock, a style invented for teenagers—or, more precisely, one adapted from an older style made originally for adults, the blues—endures as a bluntly, rudely cogent expression of adolescent anxiety, rage, and sexual fantasy. *Long live rock and roll! The beat of the drums, loud and bold!* Over the decades since Chuck Berry wrote that pithy hard-driving couplet, Berry, like other surviving early rockers, has sustained a career into old age by serving as a nostalgist. He denies the calendar and sings about high school and dating and cruising down empty highways in V-8s, evoking an always romanticized image of teen life in the 1950s for multiple generations of listeners who seek to experience rock and roll in the extant form closest to its essence. Berry's chief acolytes, the Rolling Stones, ply a kindred nostalgia for the 1960s and 1970s, as do various Motown acts that are on perpetual tour in the arts-center circuit. For musicians disinclined to work in self-tribute bands, however, it is not easy to rock and age. Rock, at its crude best, is a music of disgrace, anathema to aging (or doing anything else) gracefully.

SONGS FROM THE LABYRINTH
Sting
(Deutsche Grammophon)

In the past few years, several prominent rockers of a certain age have pursued a novel solution to the problem of growing too old to rock and roll—an approach more ambitious, if less remunerative, than self-imitation, and better, if more conspicuously unnatural, than Botox. They are backdating their careers, repositioning themselves so as to be associated with styles of music that preceded rock. Bruce Springsteen, with his Seeger Sessions revue, has put aside the E Street Band and shore-bar rock to do old-timey barn-dance music, nearly completing his transformation into a folksy troubadour of the Depression era. Bob Dylan, on *Love and Theft* and *Modern Times*, has mingled rock and blues songs with softly lilting numbers that sound like the Victrola curios that his old Greenwich Village friend Tiny Tim used to warble. Dylan croons this disarmingly cornball material in a sweet croak—half Rudy Vallee, half cement mix; and, on the road, he and his band dress in matching rhinestone-cowboy outfits, like a group decked out for its Grand Ole Opry debut in the late 1940s. Eric Clapton, once an innovator of hard-rock guitar, has, on recent albums and tours, focused on the blues of Robert Johnson and B. B. King (with a side trip into the 1960s for a set of concerts with the reconstituted Cream). A tier or two down the ranks of the rock hierarchy,

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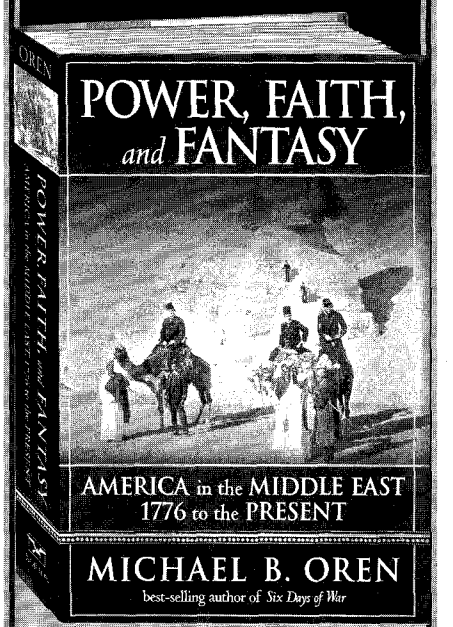
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meanwhile, the great doo-wopper Dion has followed Clapton along the road to Johnson-style country blues; and Rod Stewart, confronted with the fact that few of us under fifty think he's sexy, has been trying to become a Rat Pack–style swinger, singing approximations of the treasured melodies of pop standards; and Donovan, the archetype of 1960s hippiedom, has attempted a comeback as an Ike-age coffeehouse beatnik.

Each of these efforts represents not just a detour from rock but also a claim to higher ground. Since we like to think of aging as advancing, and since rock is elementally a milieu of the young, the styles of work taken up by aging pop musicians are supposed to be more advanced or elevated than rock. It is telling that so many older rockers are turning to the past, looking not outside of rock but before it to find music that seems in some way superior—ostensibly purer in its primordial quality, as we conceive of the blues; supposedly more authentic in its ruralism, as we consider folk music; or presumably more refined in its formal sophistication, as we think of Tin Pan Alley. Springsteen, Dylan, Clapton, and their colleagues in backdating are submitting to a kind of pop prelapsarianism—a belief that, in key ways, music was better before their own time. The proposition has a justifying patina of classicism and a discomforting tinge of self-abnegation.

AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THIS camp, the winner of the badge for longest distance traveled backward in time goes hands down to Sting. A few months ago, the one-time front man for the Police and long-time paragon of pop-rock seriousness, now fifty-five, told an interviewer of his midlife disenchantment with contemporary music. "Rock has come to a standstill—it's not going forward anymore," he said. "It only bores me." The claim itself, which Bono echoed recently, is of little note; pop music has always had periods of lull, and the current one seems relatively minor. In the past year, there was fine, probative new music from at least half a dozen young bands, such as Comets on Fire, the Mars Volta, and Coheed and Cambria. More interesting is Sting's response to the stasis that he described, and that was not to try moving in the forward direction he advocated, but to spin around and head backward in musical time—past Rod Stewart, Cream, the Stones, and Chuck Berry ... past Sinatra, B. B. King, and Robert Johnson ... past Irving Berlin, past Stephen Foster, past Beethoven ... all the way back five centuries to the first broadly popular music in the English language, the songs of the lute-playing minstrels of the Renaissance.

Sting's latest CD, which has hovered around the top of the classical-music charts since its release in October, is an album devoted to the words and music of John Dowland, the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century composer. A lutenist, songwriter, and singer celebrated throughout much of Europe as well as in his native England during his lifetime, Dowland was a contemporary of Shakespeare (the former probably born a year before the latter), and his music has the gleeful worldliness and intermittently sorrowful buoyancy that we have come to know as Elizabethan. He composed approximately a hundred instrumental pieces, most of them for solo lute (along with some consort works for viola and lute), and roughly the same number of songs intended for lute and voice—although, as always in the case of itinerant musicians who drew from folk sources, precise attribution of work associated with Dowland is impossible. Created during the early flowering of English-language vocal music, Dowland's songs are tuneful, elegant, and widely varied in style and mood. They have been recorded many times since the rise of the early-music movement during the 1920s and 1930s, though Sting, in interviews to promote his new CD, has suggested that Dowland had been largely unknown before he discovered him and rescued him from obscurity to rival that of, say, Andy Summers or Stewart Copeland.

Like many children of the postwar years, I first heard Dowland's music in recordings by Julian Bream, the English concert guitarist and lutenist who had a sizable popular following in the 1960s, when an escalation of scholarly interest in early music coincided with the hippie culture's romance with things vaguely evocative of the Renaissance, such as flowing hair, froufrou, dirt, and archaic Old World instruments. All a rock band needed to impart a song with that *now* sound was a harpsichord or a lute on the chorus and a recorder solo. What were the Stones doing with a harpsichord on "Dandelion"? They were evoking a musical past so distant, so weird to ears of the jet age, that it seemed spacey. The original *Star Trek* television series employed the same juxtaposition of the Elizabethan and the futuristic by having various characters, including Spock, strum sci-fi lutes. The one time I saw Bream in concert, at Town Hall in the early 1970s, while I was an undergraduate, I went with two other members of a pretentious jazz-rock band I was playing in, and Bream's encore was a Beatles tune.

With his new CD, then, Sting is not simply exploring the Renaissance but also revisiting the 1960s (and the early 1970s, which, after all, were essentially still the 1960s)—the period that predated his own coming of age. This is scarcely the first time an artist has enacted a public struggle with his creative identity by poking around the world in which he was made.

THE ALBUM IS CALLED *SONGS From the Labyrinth*. While John Dowland had nothing to do with labyrinths, as far as I can tell, Sting has one of them in the backyard of his castle. It is a replica of the famous labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral, naturally. When the guitarist Dominic Miller commissioned a customized lute for Sting, he had the luthier carve the instrument's sound hole in the pattern of the labyrinth at Sting's house/Chartres. The CD's title suggests that the album is one of songs from Sting's lute. Yet it is not quite that.

The front cover shows Sting clutching his lute and looking magnificently chiseled, and in four more photos in the booklet he is either playing the lute or posing with it. On the recording itself, however, Sting plays on only two of the twenty-three tracks; one of them is only twenty-eight seconds long, and the other is a duet with the CD's principal lutenist, Edin Karamazov. Sting's abstinence from the instrument is no great detriment, fortunately. When he does play the lute, his attack is unduly harsh and percussive—a rocker's approach to a stroller's instrument. On nearly all the tracks, Karamazov, a skilled lutenist and guitarist from Sarajevo, handles the lute playing, and his work on the CD bursts with life. Karamazov is inclined to gypsy-style busyness, fancy shows of speed and facility. His style may not please all scholars of Elizabethan music, but it is fun.

Dowland's music is intimate, made for performances in close quarters to fairly small gatherings of patrons and their guests. In a few surviving scores of Dowland's quartet pieces, we find all

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four parts printed on one sheet of paper; each set of staves runs parallel to one of the four sides of the sheet, so the musicians could sit around a small table and read from the music. For me, the prospect of Sting attempting to perform such quiet, delicate music was tantalizing. His own songs, including the many ballads that he recorded both with the Police and on his own, have tended to aim for grandness, if not grandiosity. Reduction would not diminish his music. It could give it human scale.

Unfortunately, Sting oversings Dowland's songs, spoiling them with the same outsized smugness that has often infused his own music. Early on in his career, the detachment that he exudes worked well with his material. "Don't Stand So Close to Me" is, after all, a paean to distance, as is "Walking on the Moon." "Roxanne" is about a lover ill-disposed to intimacy, a prostitute; and in "Every Breath You Take," the singer is not engaged with the object of his desire, he is stalking her. These songs are less about love than about its denial, and it is wholly fitting to sing them from a cool remove. Sting's voice has always had a forced, mannered quality as well, though that seemed in keeping with the affected Caribbean inflections of his early music, a white English adaptation of reggae. On *Songs From the Labyrinth*, however, Sting comes off as haughty and strident when he should sound as if he is, for once, standing close to us.

In addition to songs associated with Dowland and his era, *Songs From the Labyrinth* includes excerpts from Dowland's correspondence, read by Sting. This text is, for the most part, obsequious flattery, boasting of status, and obligatory politesse from a servant of various courts to his patrons. In one letter to Sir Robert Cecil, Dowland wrote:

> And according as I desired ther cam a letter to me out of Germany from the Duke of Brunswicke, wherupon I spoke to your honor and to my Lord of Essex, who willingly gav me both your hands (for which I wold be glad if ther wear any service in me that yor honors coulde command). When I cam to the Duke of Brunswicke he usde me kingly me, and gave me a rich chaine of golde....

That sort of thing. Sting intones this benign arcana with austere gravity and little apparent regard for the words themselves. Every excerpt sounds the same, another excuse for Sting to speak in the formal cadences of Olde English—to impress without expressing anything in particular.

With *Songs From the Labyrinth*, Sting has given in fully to his critics' worst charges. Perhaps becoming a minstrel of Elizabethan lute songs will liberate him and free, free, set Sting (and us) free from his labyrinthine pretensions. Then again, Sting may well feel perfectly at ease with Dowland's grandiloquent bids for favor with the aristocracy of his day. *Songs From the Labyrinth* has earned Sting an invitation to sing and play his lute for the present-day Queen Elizabeth. If some admirers of his early rock records have felt betrayed by Sting in recent years, one reason consistent with the coldness and pretense of his music is a sense, magnified by images of him luting for the queen, that he would like to abandon rock royalty for the real thing. One might expect him to be gratified enough to have been knighted, but—I'm sorry. I forgot: that hasn't happened just yet. My mind jumped ahead a few months. ■

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Nicholas Lemann

What Is the South?

I.

CONTEMPORARY POLITICIANS who are good at what they do have to have a number of skills—negotiating ability, tirelessness, physical presence, agility under changing circumstances, an unshakable confidence that the voters want them—but writing ability is no longer one of them. The memoirs of Senators Jesse Helms and Trent Lott make for a good illustration. Both men were born into lower-middle-class obscurity in small southern towns and rose very high in American politics. Getting through an entire career without a defeat is almost as rare in a politician as in a boxer, but both Helms and Lott have perfect win-loss records—despite, in Helms's case, unusually determined opposition and a constituency capable of electing candidates from the other party. Even discounting for luck and happenstance, they must have a lot on the ball. Both have gotten to know pretty well all the leading American political figures of the late twentieth century, plus assorted others (the jacket of Helms's book has pictures of him with Solzhenitsyn, Thatcher, the Dalai Lama, and Bono).

They ought to have fascinating and important contextual stories to tell, too. Helms and Lott started their careers as aides to conservative Democratic members of Congress, but they both switched to the Republican Party early on, just before making their first races for office, in both cases in 1972. They have been leaders of the South's progression from solidly Democratic to solidly Republican, and they could, theoretically, explain why that happened. Helms, who was present at the creation of the Moral Majority and was the first senator to endorse Ronald Reagan for president, is an important figure in the history of the conservative movement; Lott, who was a member of Newt Gingrich's circle during his years in the House of Representatives, has spent much of his career managing the fit between the movement and the Republican establishment, to the point where they have become almost, but not quite, the same thing. They both might be able to offer interesting thoughts on the rise of conservatism from a marginal position in American politics to a dominant one.

And both, working as writers rather than as politicians, manage to drain just about all the inherent interest from their life stories. Their memoirs are opaque in different ways. Helms is an ideologue who is so deeply sure that he is right about the world and most other politicians are wrong that persuasion, or even explanation, is beyond him. This is about as detailed a description as we ever get from him of what he thinks: "Broadly speaking, people who think we need less government instead of more are called conservatives. Those who want as much government as they can get are called liberals. I'm a conservative, and I make no apology for it!" There are few Cincinnatus figures in the upper reaches of American politics. Helms has always worked in and around government, including as a lobbyist for a banking association and as a broadcaster for the Tobacco Radio Network—but his confidence that government is anathema is utterly serene.

Helms's writing provides a nice illustration of the proposition that it is difficult to create life on the page without at least enough distance to be able to articulate your passions. Reagan is probably the person he admires most, but it was not an entirely smooth relationship because, by Helms's lights, Reagan regularly sold out to the center—by declining entreaties from Helms and others to start a conservative third party, or by choosing George H.W. Bush as his running mate in 1980. Any chance, then, of interesting musings about the leading conservative of the last half-century? Sorry. "It was our mutual commitment to the principle that the United States must use its strength to further the causes of freedom and peace, and our mutual belief that this country must never retreat from that which made us great, that kept us personal friends and political allies for many decades, even when we had differences over specific issues."

Lott has similarities to Helms—lifelong politician, "conservative" in a way that he feels deeply but can't explain except by employing bromides—but at his core he is a different type. He is an insider. His memoir has more life to it than Helms's (which isn't saying much), thanks substantially to a number of recurring and deeply felt scenes in which Lott sets himself up as the leader of a little-known core group that runs things. (You can't miss Lott's shiver of pleasure when he reports that people called his leadership team in the Senate the Council of Trent.) The joy that Lott derives from this is palpable; seeing it helps to explain why it hurt so much for him to lose his position as Senate majority leader in 2002, and why he bothered to fight his way back into the Republican Senate leadership in 2006. He has none of Helms's moralism; he wants to be in on the deal-making. "Of course I have a set of strong philosophical principles," he remarks. "But what good is an unbending purist position if you don't produce results for the people you care about and your country?" It is impossible to imagine Helms saying that.

The product of what sounds like a pretty miserable childhood (no money, an itinerant alcoholic father, years of parental battling culminating in a divorce), Lott

HERE'S WHERE I STAND: A MEMOIR
By Jesse Helms
(Random House, 317 pp., $25.95)

HERDING CATS: A LIFE IN POLITICS
By Trent Lott
(Regan Books, 312 pp., $27.50)

WHISTLING PAST DIXIE: HOW DEMOCRATS CAN WIN WITHOUT THE SOUTH
By Thomas F. Schaller
(Simon & Schuster, 336 pp., $26)

THERE GOES MY EVERYTHING: WHITE SOUTHERNERS IN THE AGE OF CIVIL RIGHTS, 1945–1975
By Jason Sokol
(Alfred A. Knopf, 433 pp., $27.95)

Nicholas Lemann, the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and a staff writer for THE NEW YORKER, *is the author, most recently, of* REDEMPTION: THE LAST BATTLE OF THE CIVIL WAR *(Farrar, Straus and Giroux).*

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has always gotten enormous gratification from membership and validation. In college at Ole Miss, he was head cheerleader, "commander" of his fraternity, president of the interfraternity council, and founder of a singing group named after the chancellor of the university. At Ole Miss law school, he was a fraternity president again. During his brief career as a young lawyer in southern Mississippi, he was president of the local Jaycees. As a young congressman, he was elected to the Chowder and Marching Society.

On and on his career as a kind of Sunbelt Bonesman went—until, in the 1990s, he formed a secret political partnership with President Clinton, through the good offices of their mutual political consultant Dick Morris. Clinton derived more benefit from the relationship than Lott did—it would have been better for Bob Dole, Lott's superior in the Senate leadership and then the Republican presidential nominee in 1996, if Lott had not delivered to Clinton a welfare-reform bill he could feel comfortable signing just before the final phase of his re-election campaign, and in 1999 Lott arranged Clinton's Senate trial on terms that guaranteed he would not be convicted—but surely Lott derived more joy from it. Nothing matters more to Lott than mattering.

II.

LOTT'S FALL CAME AFTER HE DECLARED, at a hundredth-birthday party for Senator Strom Thurmond, that "when Strom Thurmond ran for president, [Mississippians] voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either." He said this at a public event, and nothing happened immediately. Gradually, over the next couple of weeks, what he had said generated a Washington feeding frenzy. It is now often cited as a prime example of the political influence of the blogosphere, since the mainstream press initially ignored Lott's remark.

It makes sense that people would be shocked by Lott's having publicly praised the presidential campaign of a third party formed in protest from the right against the Democratic Party's extremely mild reformist position on the Jim Crow system in the South; but it is also easy to see why Lott felt blindsided. Thurmond had been treated in Washington as a lovable old huggy-bear for decades. Lott's first boss and predecessor in Congress, William Colmer, had supported Thurmond's Dixiecrat Party in 1948. Many prominent Republicans, including Lott and Reagan, had opposed the civil rights legislation that ended Jim Crow, and in the present nobody ever made a fuss about that. In 1980, Lott had arranged for Reagan to make his first Mississippi political appearance at the Neshoba County Fair, which is where one of the best-known martyrdoms of the civil rights era—the murders of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney—took place, and whatever controversy that engendered had long since died down. Lott's suspicion that, if the Bush White House hadn't had it in for him (because, he suspects, he was prepared to block the federal prescription-drug benefit that Bush wanted to pass in 2003), the controversy would have gone away, is highly plausible.

Formerly anti-civil-rights southern politicians who are still active, like Lott and, until recently, Helms, have a well-worked-out mantra on the subject, which both men repeat in their memoirs. They were raised to treat black people cordially and respectfully. They have always had warm relations with blacks. They now have black staff members. They are not "racist" and never have been. They have come to accept the civil rights laws whose passage they opposed. "During the turbulent times in the civil rights struggle," Helms writes, "people from outside the South totally misunderstood the nature and intent of many Southerners. They thought opposition to the proposed laws meant hostility toward blacks. That simply was not true. Many good people who supported the principle of progress for everyone could not agree to the destruction of one citizen's freedom in order to convey questionable 'rights' to another. They believed forced social engineering was hazardous to the freedom we all deserve."

Both Lott and Helms are being selective in their presentation of personal racial history. Lott does not mention that as a college student he voted against the integration of his fraternity. Helms does not mention that his television commentaries during the 1960s were occasionally reprinted by the White Citizens' Council, or that, on the very first campaign he worked for, he referred to his state university as the University of Negroes and Communists. That does not necessarily mean, however, that they are consciously hypocritical, that they sit around the

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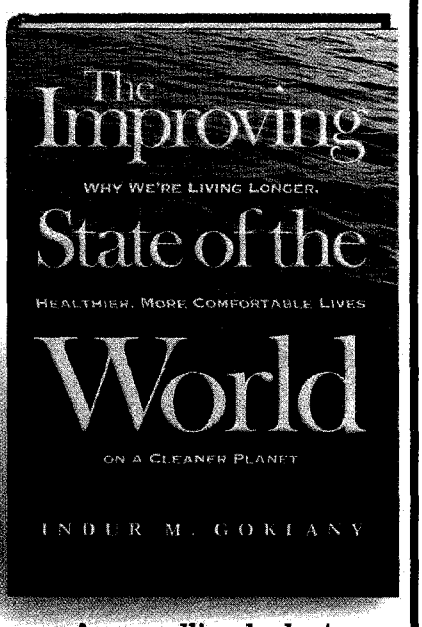

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family dinner table talking longingly about the days of segregation or even slavery. Life is more complicated than that. Lott's description of the integration of Ole Miss in his book serves as a good example of the series of maneuvers the partially repentant southern politician makes. First, he says, "Integration was steamrolling through the South. Its time had come. I didn't want anybody in our [fraternity] house entangled in a violent and foolish nostalgia for segregation."

But he left the crisis more upset at the federal government for sending troops to enforce the university's integration than at the white resistance led by Governor Ross Barnett: "I felt anger in my heart over the way the federal government had invaded Ole Miss to accomplish something that could have been handled peacefully and administratively." This is a familiar southern refrain. Federal interference, not integration, is what Lott retrospectively finds objectionable. The problem with this view is that federal interference, up to and including military compulsion, has always accompanied racial progress in the South, at least since the days of the Emancipation Proclamation; and conversely, the elimination of military enforcement of civil rights at the end of Reconstruction was what ushered in the Jim Crow era. The idea that this time the South would have integrated a public facility on its own is like saying that this time Lucy isn't going to snatch Charlie Brown's football away at the last minute.

Lott is retrospectively for integration only under a highly constrained set of conditions that would not have actually produced it. And when he went on to law school, he had another civil rights experience that pushed him to the right: "Ole Miss brought down several professors from Yale Law School to teach us constitutional law and, in particular, the intricacies of the new civil rights legislation. They were young and personable; we would eat with them in the cafeteria, drink beer in the evening, and discuss the issues of the day. But they also were liberal and had an attitude problem. They were at Ole Miss, they felt, to lead these poor, barefoot Southern boys out of the wilderness.... What those young professors did was to create a backlash. Instead of making us more liberal, they helped to create a generation of thoughtful, issue-oriented conservatives who grew up to run Mississippi politics." Here is another venerable southern sentiment: the resentment of moralistic carpetbaggers. It is hardly impossible to believe that Lott was treated condescendingly by whomever it was. What's noteworthy is where Lott places the emphasis—his notion that the end of a legal caste system in Mississippi and the snobbery of a few visitors from the liberal elite are phenomena of equal importance, or even that the latter has more gravity than the former.

III.

THE SOUTH IS A BIG, COMPLICATED region, but the simplest available explanation of its politics is that they are primarily racial. From the end of Reconstruction through World War II, Southern voters were overwhelmingly white, and were unified by their dislike of the Republican Party. Pro–civil rights sentiment was detectable in the national Democratic Party from the New Deal onward, but Franklin Roosevelt's economic policies were so popular in the South, and his embrace of civil rights so faint, that the South stayed solid for the Democrats through his death. Not long after that, the Democrats' hold on the South began to loosen. Thurmond's Dixiecrat defection came well before what we now think of as the beginning of the civil rights movement, and Dwight Eisenhower carried four of the Confederate states in 1952 and five in 1956. Since 1964, the Republican Party has been strongly ascendant in the South, first in national elections, then in state and local ones, even though the Voting Rights Act brought the South an enfranchised black populace for the first time in nearly a century.

In national politics, this has had a curious double effect: it has made the Republican Party much more powerful, but within the Democratic Party it has empowered southerners. Every successful Democratic candidate for president in the past forty years, plus one almost-successful one (Al Gore), has come from the old Confederacy. The reason is obvious: chipping off just two or three southern states creates a Democratic presidential majority. Yet Thomas F. Schaller is here to argue that the Democrats should now ditch the South.

Schaller's book is not an analysis of southern politics, it is a prescription for Democratic presidential victory. Such books fall into two broad categories: those that want the Democrats to move to the center and those that want them to move to the left. *Whistling Past Dixie* is a move-to-the-left book. Schaller believes that the Democrats can seriously pursue the possibility of winning southern states only by trying to appeal to conservatives, which is not something that appeals to him. Anyway, he argues, it won't work. Instead, he sees the West as the area of opportunity for the party. A farther-left Democratic presidential majority can be achieved, he says, by forgetting about the South and assembling a different collection of states.

Although the election results of last fall make the opening sentence of Schaller's book—"The Democrats are in disarray"—look outdated, his overall argument stands up pretty well. The Democrats gained less in the South than elsewhere last fall, and where they did gain it was usually in border states, via notably conservative candidates who did not win by much, such as James Webb in Virginia. Schaller argues that the South is so deeply conservative mainly because of race and religion—that southerners prefer to vote on non-economic issues. He treats Trent Lott and Jesse Helms in particular as racial politicians. Helms "embodied the tradition of steadfast southern resistance to racial equality."

IS THERE ANY WAY TO RECONCILE Lott's and Helms's strenuous insistence that they are not racist with Schaller's insistence that they are? If there were, one place to look for it might be in Jason Sokol's book, which is an ambitious attempt to describe the attitudinal changes that the civil rights revolution engendered in white southerners. This is obviously a retooled dissertation, and it draws primarily on a very broad scan of archival material from across the South. (I was pleasantly surprised to see my late cousin Arthur "Bubs" Lemann, of Donaldsonville, Louisiana, quoted on page 26.) Although Sokol focuses closely on a few places, including New Orleans and Albany, Georgia, his book has the strengths and the weaknesses of a survey: it covers a lot of ground, but it does not have a single story to tell or a clear argument to make, other than that civil rights revolutionized the white South.

Early in the book Sokol notes, promisingly, that the word "racist" is not very useful as a way of understanding the white southern mind. It oversimplifies—as he says, most white southerners before civil rights persuaded themselves that

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southern blacks were happy, and loved and protected by them—and it implies a pseudo-scientism that fails to capture the psychological richness of the hot stew of fear, aggression, lust, fascination, and guilt that simmers away inside white southerners. But Sokol doesn't really nail down an alternate hypothesis. He has many interesting and insightful things to say along the way, but he ends the book with this unpardonably wishy-washy sentence: "As the civil rights struggles upended and recast everyday life in thousands of towns, white southerners variously accepted, rejected, and absorbed the untold effects of that interracial revolution."

As a consequence of which people wind up being interviewed by journalists, sitting for oral-history interviews, and writing letters and memoirs, Sokol's research skews him toward the patrician end of the white southern class spectrum, and even within that end toward liberals. Southern white liberals of the civil rights era are admirable people—they endured social opprobrium often, economic reprisals sometimes, and violence in a few cases—but they tend toward self-congratulation. The psychological drama of their own inner triumph over prejudice (their "liberation," as Sokol puts it) gets overplayed, especially in comparison with the much more miraculous achievements, against much longer odds and at much higher risk, of the black civil rights movement. Sokol quotes the redoubtable Virginia Durr of Birmingham, Alabama, as saying in 1967: "Reconstructed Southerners are the most attractive people there are. They know from experience the ease of evil ways, and the difficulty breaking away from them.... We emancipated southerners really are prizes!"

What you really want from Sokol is to have him apply his patient intelligence to the likes of Helms and Lott (both of whom he mentions)—or, even better, to politically typical white southerners, that is, those who were brought up as Democrats, who are now enthusiastic Republicans, and who insist that their motive for switching was not racial. Such people turn up from time to time in *There Goes My Everything*, but you do not finish the book feeling that you understand them. It is fair to say that in some areas white southerners adapted to civil rights more quickly than even optimists in the 1960s expected. This is especially the case with the "public accommodations" section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—the part that integrated buses, lunch counters, and bathrooms—and with the overall project of enfranchising black voters. It is also the case that in those realms of southern life where segregation is most likely to linger—housing, schools, jobs—the southern pattern is now similar to the national pattern. But this kind of progress just intensifies the question of why large parts of the North are capable of being politically separate-but-liberal, and most of the white South is not.

AT LEAST AMONG HISTORIANS, the most powerful and attractive explanation of the last half-century was the one offered, in many books over the years, by C. Vann Woodward: that the South is (potentially, at least) a naturally economically populist region, whose rightful ruling coalition of working blacks and whites has been consistently split apart by Bourbons who played the race card as a way of protecting their own economic interests. I do not mean to oversimplify Woodward's shelf of great books, but it is fair to say that in his version of the South not many whites are incurable racehaters. The rich are primarily interested in staying that way, and the poor are distracted, rather than fundamentally motivated, by racial issues.

Woodward's version of the South has always been immensely appealing to anybody who wanted to see liberal political potential in the region. (It would begin to emerge as soon as the South got beyond race.) And by making Jim Crow seem like an unfortunate and avoidable wrong turn, Woodward's work offered strong support for the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted Woodward in the speech that he gave at the movement's apogee moment, the culmination of the Selma-to-Montgomery march at the Alabama state capitol in the summer of 1965. What historian's work has ever had such powerful, and such positive, influence?

The problem is that southern politics since the success of the civil rights movement has not offered much support to Woodward's account of the South. Black southern voters are heavily Democratic. White southern voters are heavily Republican. Democratic politicians who have been able to put together winning

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Fifty Years Since Roth v. United States

The National Tragedy of the Supreme Court's Misjudgment on Obscenity

by Daniel Mark Cohen

When the Founding Fathers ratified the free speech provision of the First Amendment, they chose to express that rule of law in figurative terms: *"Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."*

The same rule of law rendered literally is: *"Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of [the spoken word], or the [printed word]."* Certainly, in adopting the First Amendment, the Founding Fathers did not mean: *"Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom to distribute photographs and motion pictures of women engaged in various acts of prostitution."* And yet, in effect, the latter proposition is precisely the rule of law established and upheld by the United States Supreme Court over the past five decades.

The First Amendment was conceived, composed, and ratified to protect *words*, the exclusive medium by which human beings translate political and social ideas into communicable language. That is to say, the word "speech" as used in the First Amendment is properly defined almost exclusively in terms of *words*. In contrast, *pictures* do not constitute a form of speech, although to the degree such images serve to advance political and social ideas, and so, appeal to a man's Reason, they are properly classified as a variant form of speech. The political cartoon, a unique hybrid of word and image, is the clearest example. But pornography, that is, photographic representations of women engaged in acts of prostitution, created to appeal, not to a man's Reason, but rather to excite and advance his sexual desire, is not a form of speech, and so, is not properly entitled to protection by the First Amendment.

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biracial coalitions have generally been much more on the model of Clinton and Gore (as he was in the twentieth century)—pro-business moderates—than the kind of two-fisted economic populists who occupied the warmest spot in Woodward's liberal heart. Quite often business interests have tried to play down, rather than enhance, the South's racial preoccupations in order to attract northern investment; they made the argument that the region was, as the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce used to say, "too busy to hate." Even during the period that Woodward focused on, the last three decades of the nineteenth century, southern politics were not latently economic, but racial, at their core.

Southern politicians who have held national office have almost never put racial arguments at the center of their self-presentation. States' rights goes back to the days of the Founders and John C. Calhoun. The white opponents of Reconstruction said they were motivated by that, plus opposition to high taxes and expansion of government. Cultural traditionalism (formerly agrarian, more recently cultural and religious) is another long-running southern rhetorical stance. And yet the South is the region more dominated than any other by the overwhelming reality of having two ethnic groups yoked together historically in every possible way, one in a superior position over the other. As Schaller reminds us, the South is still by far the blackest region of the United States; and, generally, the higher the proportion of the black population in a southern state, the more prone its white population is to bloc voting on the opposite side from the blacks. It's as if there is a historical and demographic threshold above which white voters cannot avoid voting racially. Only the South reaches that threshold; elsewhere, whites as political actors tend to be less controlled by their whiteness.

This doesn't mean that southern white voters are consciously voting racially. It is far more comfortable to choose to understand the world through concepts such as cultural traditionalism and suspicion of the federal government than explicitly through the prism of race, especially since both ways of understanding the world have tended to serve the same ends equally well. It is possible that Lott contrived, quite sincerely, to forget what Thurmond's long-ago presidential campaign had been about, and to remember instead only how it felt.

Before civil rights, the most talented southern politicians often rose to high positions in Congress—indeed, they dominated it—but were unable to run for president because being southern made one so politically different from most of the country. Since civil rights, the situation has been reversed. There have been a lot of southern Republican congressional leaders—Gingrich, Lott, Tom DeLay, Dick Armey, and so on—but the South's political differentness, racial in origin if not in explicit content, has been an impediment to presidential ambition. That is one reason why Lott's successor as Senate majority leader, Bill Frist, abandoned his presidential campaign: he tacked toward the South (he is the author of the foreword to Helms's book) in ways that took him out of national range. It is also why, in the realm of domestic politics, President Bush and his aides are so preoccupied with bringing minority voters into the Republican Party. The South is still so politically distinctive that it can enormously influence, even if it cannot dominate, the course of the entire country. It was ever thus, and race is the reason why. ■

Joseph Frank
Being and Laziness

OBLOMOV
By Ivan Goncharov
Translated by Stephen Pearl
(Bunim & Banigan, 443 pp., $45)

I.

ANYONE WITH A CLAIM TO literacy is familiar with the names of Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Dostoevsky, and can cite some of the titles of their most famous works. But Goncharov and his novel *Oblomov*, of which a new translation, a snappily colloquial and readable one, has just been published—who ever heard of them?

Well, Beckett for one, who was told to read *Oblomov* by his mistress Peggy Guggenheim, and soon signed some of his letters to her with this cognomen. I recall my teacher at the University of Chicago long ago, the renowned classicist David Grene, who had been a fellow student of Beckett's at Trinity College, Dublin, telling me that the future famous writer was well-known as a very late riser and missed classes for this reason. Since the main character of *Oblomov* also finds it very difficult to leave his couch—whether he succeeds in doing so or not (literally as well as symbolically) constitutes the main thread of the extremely tenuous action of the novel—Beckett's instant attraction to this character is easily comprehensible. There is also good reason to believe that the figure in *Waiting for Godot* bearing the Russian name of Vladimir is a tribute to this unexpectedly Slavic aspect of Beckett.

Aside from their greater familiarity, none of the titles of the more famous Russian writers can rival Goncharov's in having provided a new word to the Russian language. Open any Russian dictionary and you will find the word *oblomovshchina*, defined, in the first one that comes to hand, as "carelessness, want of energy, laziness, negligence," and specifying its origin in Goncharov's novel, where the word itself is used. Scarcely any other novelist, Russian or otherwise (except perhaps Cervantes), could boast of having created a character whose attributes have left such an indelible impression on the vocabulary, and on the national psyche, of his country.

SO WHO WAS IVAN GONCHAROV, and why has the character he created taken on such ineradicably symbolic proportions? He was born in 1812 in a town on the Volga named Simbirsk, which struck all who came to visit it, including the poet Lermontov, as the epitome of "sleep and laziness." "Even [the] Volga," he wrote, "rolled here slower and smoother." Goncharov himself later agreed that "the whole appearance of my home

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town was a perfect picture of sleepiness and stagnation."

He came from a very prosperous merchant family, and was one of the few Russian writers of this period descended from such a background. When he wished to study at the University of Moscow, it was necessary for him to obtain freedom from the guild of merchants in order not to be forced to follow in his father's footsteps. Despite climbing the ladder to the highest ranks of the civil service, and even being appointed tutor to a presumed inheritor to the throne who died prematurely, it would appear that Goncharov could never shake off a certain sense of discomfort deriving from this relatively lowly origin. He was known for his shy and retiring personality, and such reticence may well be attributed to a lingering uneasiness about his status in the carefully delineated Russian caste society. The merchant class in Russia had little, if any, contact with the Western European values that had shaped the aristocracy, and was generally regarded as backward and obscurantist. Goncharov was perhaps unable to overcome the psychological results of this inauspicious heritage, despite his success.

His father died when he was seven, and a tenant of the family, an ex-naval officer of noble birth who was also a Freemason, moved into the main house on the family estate, thus becoming a substitute father (his relations with Goncharov's mother are unclear). He opened Goncharov to a wider cultural horizon and a more elegant and sophisticated way of life than was customary among the merchant class. It may also have provided Goncharov with a tenant-landlord pattern that was later used in *Oblomov* in reverse, so that the upper-class anti-hero ultimately marries the lower-class landlady who has unstintingly taken care of all his material needs, and whose devotion allows him to sink into a restful if self-defeating torpor. Curiously enough, in his later years Goncharov also assumed responsibility for the family of his manservant, whose widow and three children were taken into Goncharov's home and, since he never married, constituted an otherwise absent family. Here he was following a pattern already depicted in *Oblomov*, in which the protagonist derives some satisfaction from tutoring the children of his landlady by a former marriage.

Goncharov very early learned French and German—and English, too, which was much less common; and he read widely in the Romantic literature of the time. Initially sent to a School of Commerce at the urging of his mother, he later spoke of this establishment with loathing, and was then allowed to enroll in the department of philology at the University of Moscow. Here he came into contact with some of the leading minds of his era, when Romanticism and Idealism and combinations thereof were imported from Germany and became all the rage in Russsian culture. In contrast with literary rivals such as Turgenev and Tolstoy, who inherited fortunes, and more like Dostoevsky, who was dependent on his writings for his income, Goncharov was forced to earn his living. On graduation he entered the civil service bureaucracy.

Some notion of how he regarded his post can be gathered from the pages of his novel in which he describes Oblomov's reaction to the brief period in which he served in a similar situation. Reared in the lap of comfort and indolence, Oblomov had instinctively assumed that his life would continue to be much the same in the bureaucracy. "Oblomov's misgivings only increased when he saw packages flashing by marked 'urgent' and 'extremely urgent,' when he was made to write out and copy all kinds of papers and documents, rummage in files and fill writing pads as thick as your arm whimsically referred to as 'notes.'" Worst of all was that "a couple of times they even got him out of bed in the middle of the night to make him write some 'notes.' ... Everything had to be done fast, everyone was always rushing somewhere non-stop.... The dreariness of it filled him with dread: 'it doesn't seem to leave a moment for living!' he complained." It is not surprising that when Oblomov carelessly sends a document off to Archangel instead of Astrakhan, he decides to retire rather than "face the music."

Unlike that of his fictional creation, Goncharov's civil service career was eminently successful; but it is likely that he felt a similar tedium about it. In any event, he astonished all who knew him by accepting an appointment that required him to travel around the world. In 1852, he became secretary to Admiral Putyatin of the Russian Navy, entrusted with the task of inspecting Russian posses-

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On Nonviolence and Violence
WINTER 2007

Dædalus, founded in 1955 as the Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, has served as an interpreter of social and cultural phenomena for decades. Now in a special issue, it focuses on critical issues of violence, submission, terrorism, peaceful protest, and nuclear warfare in both the past and present.

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sions in North America (they were never reached) and more importantly with seeking a commercial treaty with Japan (it was never concluded). Goncharov kept a notebook on his travels, and later published sketches of his impressions and observations in a work titled *The Frigate Pallas*, which met with some success. It was written in the ironically subdued, semi-humoristic style cultivated in *Oblomov*, which he had already begun but found difficult to complete.

Upon his return, Goncharov accepted a position in the censorship that supervised Russian publications, and retained it until his retirement in 1867. This exposed him to fierce criticism from the radicals, and even some of his more moderate friends found it difficult to accept the notion of a writer working as a censor. "If I wrote the devil knows what," he complained in a letter to a friend, "even then there would be no compassion for me, if only because of my title and position."

Still, Goncharov's record, based on his censorship reports, indicates that Russian literature may well have benefited from his supervision. No one studying nineteenth-century Russian culture can fail to be struck by the extent to which, contrary to what occurred after the Soviet takeover of power, radical criticism of the prevailing regime managed to appear in print. Of course Russian writers used what came to be known as Aesopian language, which expressed their subversive ideas indirectly; but everyone knew how to read what was implied in the figurative imagery. Indeed, Goncharov was criticized by other censors for his "liberalism," and he approved some extremely radical articles on the assumption that, as he wrote in one report, "extreme views show themselves to be flimsy before strict science and die away from the contact of critical analysis."

DESPITE THE RIGID SELF-control that allowed him to pursue a successful career, Goncharov was nonetheless assailed by inner obsessions that led to an episode whose equal it would be hard to find elsewhere in literary history. He began to work on *Oblomov* simultaneously with another book, which eventually became his third novel, *Obryv*, or *The Precipice*; and he often spoke with Turgenev of his plans for this latter work. In 1859, while *Oblomov* was appearing in installments, he accused Turgenev, with whom he had been on the best of terms, of having stolen some of the ideas for *The Precipice* and using them in his own novel *A Nest of Gentlefolk* in 1859, and then again a year later in *On the Eve*.

The outraged Turgenev asked that other members of their literary circle pass judgment on Goncharov's accusations, and several agreed to read Goncharov's plans and the novels in question. Their decision was that the relations between the plans and the novels were too indistinct to justify Goncharov's charge: whatever similarities existed arose from the fact that both had been created "on the same Russian soil." Even a member of this impromptu jury who was close to Goncharov wrote that "my friend Ivan Alexandrovich played a very unenviable role in this event," and praised Turgenev for behaving with "that particular grace which is the property of decent people of highly educated society." Turgenev broke off all relations with Goncharov, though they were presumably reconciled, at least in public, at the funeral of a member of the jury in 1864.

So Goncharov was far from being an engaging or ingratiating personality, and he had few intimate friends. Dostoevsky, who admired *Oblomov*, once wrote of its author that he embodied "the soul of a petty official, not an idea in his head, and the eyes of a steamed fish, whom God, as if for a joke, has endowed with a brilliant talent." Despite the decision of the literary jury, Goncharov continued to believe that Turgenev had pilfered his conceptions, and his delusion reached such a pitch that he claimed Turgenev was not only using them himself but passing them along to French friends such as Flaubert and a whole host of other writers including the Goncourts, George Sand, and Daudet. He even went so far as to write that Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* is "simply an abbreviated *Precipice*."

When his own novel was harshly criticized as "reactionary" and proved to be a failure with the public, Goncharov consoled himself with the illusion that its lack of success was because his own thematic inspirations had already been used by others. "What an effect this novel could and should have made," he wrote, "if only they [Turgenev and his accomplices] had not run ahead with their copies." It is little wonder that he spent the last years of his life in relative solitude.

GONCHAROV WAS BY NO MEANS a prolific writer, publishing only three novels. His first, *A Common Story*, in 1847, was written without much difficulty, and aroused the enthusiasm of the important critic Belinsky as well as the praise of Tolstoy, who was just beginning his literary career. A chapter of *Oblomov*, the famous dream of his childhood, appeared in a collection of new writing published in 1849, but the novel itself was not completed until ten years later, in a burst of inspiration that surprised Goncharov himself. As for *The Precipice*, his letters contain endless complaints about the lack of a similar inspiration, though it was finally finished at the urging of the editor of an important journal. To be sure, Goncharov's obligations as bureaucrat and censor gave him less time than others to devote to literary composition; but his notion of "realism" also proved a hindrance to the seemingly effortless productivity that

The Historian's Skull

Sometimes, a dream fills his skull
like a strong wind

so the roof lifts from the library
and the stars throw down

their points into the room.
Not yet, the mind in the skull

—

keeps saying. *No*—
dropped incense stick,

cigarette or falling match, the library
filling now with ember, flame.

What will I do with the past?
the mind asks from its skull,

—

but the past has burned away
and only the vessel remains—

the skull
like an antique pot

in which someone placed a scroll
to bury in the earth.

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he so obviously envied in his presumed imitator, the perfidious Turgenev.

Goncharov's understanding of "realism" is expressed in an exchange of letters with Dostoevsky, one of the contributors to an anthology of well-known writers that he was putting together in 1874. A famine had raged a year earlier in the province of Samara, and the proceeds from this volume were to be used for famine relief. Dostoevsky sent in a series of "little sketches," one of which contained the depiction of a priest whose behavior indicated a certain influence of the fashionable Nihilism of the radicals. Goncharov found this portrait unconvincing and expressed his opinion to Dostoevsky, who replied that priests of this kind did exist: his sketch had been taken from life; such a type was beginning to be known. Goncharov retorted that a type is formed only "when it has been repeated many times, or been noticed many times, has become customary and is well known to all."

Dostoevsky's sketch of this burgeoning type was deleted from his contribution, but it is easy to see how the creator of Raskolnikov would be especially alert to social and cultural phenomena of this kind. Goncharov's own literary horizon, by contrast, was limited by his preconception of "the typical." Its advantage was that it allowed him to endow a character such as Oblomov with an almost mythical stature. In 1859, a resounding article titled "What Is Oblomovshchina?" by the radical critic Nikolay Dobrolyubov hailed the central figure of the novel as the epitome of all those "superfluous men"—beginning with Pushkin's Eugene Onegin and continuing in works by Herzen and Turgenev (the term comes from Turgenev's story "The Diary of a Superfluous Man")—that formed a subgenre of the Russian novel up through the 1860s and beyond. Dostoevsky's Nikolay Stavrogin, in *The Devils*, may be considered an effort to provide this type with a religious-metaphysical foundation that was beyond Goncharov's range.

II.

THE READER FIRST MEETS Oblomov at the age of "thirty-two or -three," past his first youth but hardly decrepit. The description of his face already indicates the vagaries of his character, which will be developed at great length and in endless variations. "A thought would flit, bird-like, randomly across his face, glint briefly in his eyes, light on his gently parted lips, hide in the furrows of his brow, and suddenly vanish; then his whole face would radiate an even glow of unconcern. This unconcern would pass from his face into the lineaments of his body, into the very folds of his dressing gown." Such a depiction already indicates the pattern of Oblomov's life, his capacity to be roused momentarily by "a thought," which invariably arises as a response to the necessities of external social existence, and then his relapse into "an even glow of unconcern."

A few paragraphs later, the dressing gown is referred to again as being "of Persian cloth, a real Oriental robe without the slightest European touch.... The sleeves, in true Asiatic fashion, were much wider at the shoulder than at the wrist." Like many other details that first seem casual, this robe takes on symbolic proportions as the book advances. Some critics have interpreted it as a reference to an "Asiatic" tendency in the Russian character; and Oblomov's efficient and successful friend Stoltz, whose father is German, certainly forms a "Western" contrast to Oblomov's indolence and practical helplessness.

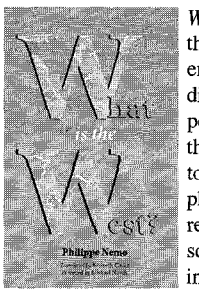
Oblomov occupies a single room in an apartment of four rooms, spends most of his time lying on a couch, and very rarely stirs from his outwardly opulent but totally neglected dwelling. He is looked after by a faithful manservant named Zakhar, who both scorns and adores him, and much prefers having a drink with other lackeys and flunkeys to performing household chores. Goncharov obtains a classic comic effect—one is sometimes reminded of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza—with the amusing and sometimes heated exchanges between the two, which continually contrast bleak reality with decayed grandeur and exalted daydreams.

A number of people come to visit the recumbent Oblomov on the first day of spring, which is treated as a holiday in Russia, and several unsuccessfully invite him for a drive to one of the outlying suburbs of Petersburg. Goncharov was a master of satirical parody, and here he takes potshots at various targets. There is a writer named Penkin, an advocate of "the realistic tendency" in literature, who advises Oblomov to read a sensational work about to be published called *The Love of the Bribetaker for the Fallen Woman*, which depicts, he insists, "all the workings of our society ... the weak but corrupt dignitary and his whole retinue of duplicitous officials." But when Penkin compares it to Dante and Shakespeare, Oblomov objects "and almost rose to his feet in his amazement." Sounding like someone who has just read Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*, he vehemently reacts: "Show us your thief, your prostitute, your pompous idiot! But where's the human being, where's the humanity in all this?" Oblomov's weaknesses and failures are most often comic, but Goncharov raises him above the level of caricature by these occasional outbursts of genuine identification with the feelings of others—a capacity most valued by those closest to him in the novel, his friend Stoltz and the woman he almost marries, Olga Ilyinskaya.

A famous set-piece of this first part of the novel is "Oblomov's Dream," which overcomes him as he falls asleep after pondering his continual failures to behave like others in meeting the obligations of real life. "Futile regrets about the past and the bitter recriminations of his own conscience pricked him like sharp needles. He strove desperately to find some guilty party or other to whom he

What is the West?

Philippe Nemo
translated by Kenneth Casler
foreword by Michael Novak



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could shift the burden of these recriminations," and he decides, much to his relief, that "it's all Zakhar's fault." This obviously evasive answer, this refusal to assume the burden of responsibility himself, is nonetheless essentially true if extended to include the world that had given birth both to Zakhar and himself, the world that he recalls in his dream.

WHAT GONCHAROV EVOKES here has been accurately called a pastoral idyll, and it is difficult briefly to do justice to its intermixture of lyrical celebration with gentle satire. It is a world in which nature and man live in a state of eternal harmony. Nature contains nothing menacing or threatening; even death comes naturally and without suffering to those who pass quietly away in old age. People contentedly exist in a self-enclosed universe with little or no knowledge of others. When peasants took their grain "to the nearest river port on the Volga," it was "the equivalent to them of Colchis and the Pillars of Hercules of classical Greek mythology."

Image after image from both nature and literature is used by Goncharov to emphasize the placidity and the tranquility of this way of life, which could not be more different from the dramatic Romantic pageantry of Sir Walter Scott, with its "ancient bard, a wild goat for ... supper and a ballad sung by a young damsel to the accompaniment of a lute." Instead, life for the young Ilya Ilyich, as well as his parents and all the others of similar rank who shared the life of Oblomovka, went undisturbedly and unquestionably on its unending rounds of "christenings, namedays, family celebrations, fast and feast days, noisy dinners, gathering of relatives, welcomes, congratulations, formal occasions of tears and smiles." All work was done by an army of peasant serfs, who appear in the background from time to time to be rebuked, as Oblomov always does with Zakhar, for one infraction or another of their appointed tasks.

The young Ilya Ilyich was guarded by peasant nannies who stirred his imagination with horrific tales taken from Russian folklore, as well as others recounting the "derrring-do of Ilya Muromets" (his namesake); and they both left "an indelible impression on the young Oblomov's mind and imagination." Carefully guarded from doing anything that might involve the slightest possibility of injury, he is unable to play with the other children. Sent to a school run with German rigor by Stoltz's father, it was there that the two boys became lifelong friends; but Ilya's own family sought any excuse (and even invented some) to keep him at home, so as to spare him the presumed hardships of the Stoltz schooling. To satisfy the school's requirements he was aided by his friend Andrei, who plays the same role in Oblomov's later years, and whose character, partly shaped by his Russian mother, is softened by his contact with Russian tenderness and emotionalism. If there is any social and cultural lesson for Russia to be derived from *Oblomov*, it would be that Russia needs a fusion of the two.

One of the problems in the interpretation of *Oblomov* is to what extent Goncharov, while unsparing in his portrayal of Oblomov's defects, nonetheless retains a certain affection for the world that produced him. The radical Dobrolyubov was entirely right in viewing Oblomov's character as an implied attack on the social milieu from which he came, and a whole line of criticism simply expands and develops this view of the book. But this milieu is portrayed with such loving detail, and the satire is so muted and even affectionate, that it has raised questions about the "ambiguity" of Goncharov's point of view. It is perfectly clear in any case that, while grateful for Dobrolyubov's enthusiasm for his novel, he did not share the latter's radical principles. Vladimir Korolenko, a noted turn-of-the-century writer, acutely remarked that "Goncharov, of course, mentally rejected 'Oblomovism,' but deep inside he loved it with profound love beyond his control."

PART 1 ENDS WITH THE ARRIVAL of Stoltz, previously only evoked in Oblomov's dreams and musings or mentioned by the narrator. Parts 2 and 3 of the book recount Oblomov's involvement with Olga, a young girl whom Stoltz has known since childhood and whom he introduces to his friend. Stoltz initially saw her "merely as a delightful child full of promise," who possessed a "sunny temperament" and was free of any "spurious sophistication." Intrigued by Oblomov, about whose peculiarites she had been informed by Stoltz, she decides to rescue him from his inertia—to bring him back to life.

Oblomov himself avoided romantic entanglements during his early years in Petersburg, even though there had been numerous opportunities, "because of the trouble involved in establishing such close relations." He particularly avoided "the pale 'damsel in distress' type, usually with dark eyes hinting glisteningly at 'tormented days and harrowing nights.'" (This is a good instance of how Goncharov uses his seemingly objective third-person narrative voice to carry on his polemic with Romantic stereotypes, and occasionally with stock reactions of the reader that he anticipates and ridicules.) But since Olga, reversing the usual relation of the sexes, takes the initiative in this instance, Oblomov is caught up in emotions that he never before experienced.

The course of their relationship is narrated with a great deal of wry humor, as Olga carries out her intention of transforming Oblomov's life—partly, it is suggested, to satisfy her own vanity. "And it would be she who would work this miracle, the shy, silent Olga whom no one had ever listened to before and who had barely experienced life herself—yes, she would bring about this transformation!" The intricacies of their romance are marked by a skillful use of symbolic detail—the aria "Casta diva" from Bellini's *Norma*; a sprig of lilac that she hands to Oblomov but then throws down in a moment of pique; the reports that she requires him to write of the books he claims to have read; and when he carelessly utters an opinion about art, even a visit to the Hermitage—the equivalent for Oblomov of a trip to the ends of the earth. Oblomov continually

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doubts that so attractive a young woman could become seriously involved with a hopeless idler like himself, and his own oscillations are noted by the narrator with both penetration and amusement.

OBLOMOV EVEN WRITES HER a lengthy letter claiming to renounce her for her own good; but eventually they become engaged. Olga insists that their engagement remain undisclosed until Oblomov takes up the burden of actually traveling to his estate, complete its necessary repairs, and investigate the continual diminution of the income from his three hundred peasant serfs. But he is incapable of occupying himself with such financial details, and so he is systematically swindled by the bailiff left in charge. Although tormented by the uncertain status of his connection with Olga, which leads to social embarrassments only adding to his inner dismay, and continually assuring her of his imminent departure, he proves unable to keep his word. Meanwhile, forced out of his apartment, he moves to one in a "street with no houses, just fences and grass, with ruts in the dried mud."

On his first visit there, he notices that the face of the landlady, though she was dressed shabbily and incongruously, "projected an impression of simple good nature," and "her bust, even though covered as it was ... could have served as a model for a painting and sculpture of a firm, healthy and substantial bosom without even a suggestion of immodesty." Always occupied with accomplishing some necessary household task, Agafya Matveyevna's bare elbows were in constant motion, and when she bent down Oblomov "could see underneath a clean skirt, clean stockings and round, plump legs." Most important, he would suddenly be confronted with a hand mysteriously appearing and offering him something delicious to eat or drink.

Goncharov thus discreetly suggests both the erotic attraction of the landlady, divorced from any of the tasks imposed by a union with Olga, and the return, as it were, to the childhood delights of Oblomovka. Ultimately this leads to the replacement of the increasingly disillusioned Olga by the devoted Agafya, dedicated entirely to Oblomov's happiness as she understands it. Olga eventually marries the much more suitable Stoltz, and both intervene to rescue Oblomov and Agafya, whom he will marry, from the clutches of her brother and his rascally cohort, who have concocted a scheme for bleeding them dry. All these twists and turns of the action are given a larger significance by a passage in which Stoltz, contemplating his own marriage, reveals the literary ancestry of Goncharov's creation.

> With a smile and with blushes alternating with frowns, he watched the endless procession of love's heroes and heroines file past: he saw Don Quixotes in steel gauntlets and the ladies of their imaginations remaining true to each other through fifty years of separation; he saw ruddy-cheeked shepherd boys with their bulging, innocent eyes and their Chloës, minding their lambs. Powdered marquises with their knowing glances and lewd smirks paraded past him in their frills and furbelows; behind them came the Werthers who had shot, hanged and strangled themselves; there were the faded spinsters in their convents shedding the endless tears of the lovelorn; there were the mustachioed latter day heroes with their flashing eyes, the witting and unwitting Don Juans, the sophisticates who tremble at the very suspicion of love but secretly adore their housekeepers—the procession went on and on.

Thus Oblomov is placed in this literary line as the latest incarnation of a perennial theme. And not only is he located in such an expanded literary and historical context, but his tirades from time to time also raise ultimate questions about the meaning of human activity and human life itself. Accused by Stoltz of *oblomovshchina*, Oblomov answers back "with a strange, searching look," but "mildly and without heat": "Isn't everybody looking for the same thing as me? ... Surely the purpose of all this hustle and bustle of yours, all these passions, wars, trade and politics is to achieve precisely this very peace and quiet, to strive for this ideal of paradise lost?" Stoltz can only reply that "Russia needs hands and heads to develop and explore its inexhaustible reserves." This is hardly an adequate response to Oblomov's large question. The same theme arises much later when Olga, living a married life of perfect happiness, is overcome by an inexplicable sadness. Stoltz can only console her by replying that "yes, that's the price we pay for Prometheus's fire, but don't think of it as a burden or a curse." One feels Goncharov reaching here for Dostoevskian themes, which he felt himself incapable of exploring but which confer upon Oblomov's character, even if only in passing, much more than a social and cultural purport.

And yet the social and cultural implications first analyzed by Dobrolyubov are what continue to give Goncharov's novel its ever-renewed topicality. It is no surprise that Lenin (who was also born, incidentally, in Simbirsk) time and again refers to Oblomov as a figure embodying all the forces opposing the transformation of Russian society that he wished to bring about. Nor could Mikhail Gorbachev resist invoking Oblomov to characterize those opposing his policy of perestroika. But the book's appeal exceeds the country and the culture of its origins. *Oblomovshchina* is a spiritual condition and a social problem that we all may recognize, whether it delights us or not. As Richard Peace has observed, *Oblomov* "has significance beyond that of its continuing relevance to Russian society and Russian culture. Happy, indeed, would be the reader who beyond laughter at Oblomov's subterfuges ... would not be aware, too, of an uneasy feeling of self-recognition." ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

ed. But Goodin is not arguing that these assumptions are right. He is offering them by stipulation, on behalf of his argument that a politician who agrees with terrorists and offers warnings in the hope that the government will capitulate to them is, to that extent, acting as a terrorist. But Williams is a thought experiment, not a real person, and I did not mean to accept Goodin's claims about when politicians should be counted as terrorists. As I suggested, politicians who exploit terrorism for their own ends are fearmongerers; they are not terrorists. Politicians who abhor violence, and who offer warnings in order to promote their political goals, should not be confused with those who engage in violence in order to promote those goals. Nonetheless, it is important to see, and to say, that those who frighten citizens to achieve or to maintain power are undermining the democratic process.

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PRINCETON DIARIST

Military Academy

A FEW WEEKS AGO, ANDREW Delbanco wrote eloquently in THE NEW REPUBLIC about the strange silence of his university in this time of war ("War College," December 11, 2006). Most people don't think of Columbia University as an island of stillness and detachment. In Morningside Heights, as in Israel, any four people usually have eight opinions and express them with articulate fury. Yet Columbia holds its peace about Iraq—and, according to Delbanco, shows few traces of its active participation in America's other wars.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, WHERE I WORK, does feel like an island, "rising," as F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in 1927, "a green Phoenix, out of the ugliest country in the world"—an idyllic haven, quiet and Gothic. At its best, it resembles the ideal college Lionel Trilling longed for, where students and faculty can ignore the present and study something serious and lasting, such as Linear B. At its worst, it's a bubble—which is how the students often describe it.

YET PRINCETON HAS ALWAYS PLAYED ITS part in America's wars. The Battle of Princeton left cannonball scars in the stone walls of Nassau Hall. In its entrance corridor, marble tablets record the names of Princetonians who have died in America's wars (equal numbers, famously, died for the North and South). Bronze stars outside the windows identify the onetime residences of those who died in the twentieth century. We have a ROTC unit—a very good one. Our students have joined, and continue to join, the military. The 2005 salutatorian, a gifted and modest historian, did so. The *Alumni Weekly* carries articles not only about General Petraeus, who took his doctorate here some years ago, but also about undergraduate alumni who have flown fighter planes over Afghanistan and fought throughout Iraq.

TALK TO SUPPORT STAFF AND SECRETARIES, custodians and craftsmen, and you hear at once of loved ones in the military. Despite the stereotypes, the war touches professors as well. One colleague's son, an infantry officer in the Marines, was badly wounded in Iraq. Another, who joined the Army as an infantryman, came back uninjured from a long period in the Sunni Triangle, where he saw—a lot. My son joined the Marines when he graduated from college in 2002. He's a helicopter pilot, and, until now, he has served in Asia. But his friends from the Basic School have gone everywhere, including Falluja and Ramadi. Some of them are dead.

SO WHAT'S OUR DUTY, AS PROFESSORS, IN this time of war? What should we say and do? We can vote for and support politicians who opposed it, as I have, if we think it's a debacle. But now, and in the future, we will have soldiers and officers in the field—strange fields where they engage in asymmetrical warfare with populations they don't know. Sometimes this will be the right thing to do. Can we help our soldiers do their job—and explain that job to their civilian bosses?

THOSE OF US WHO HAVE NEVER SERVED in the military usually don't know a lot about it. In 1975, when I arrived at Princeton, many older members of the faculty had served in World War II or the Korean war. Nowadays, by contrast, few members of the faculty have military experience—and those who do are likely to be Canadians or Israelis. Of course, some scholars study the military, past and present, but the base of direct knowledge that most of us have is not very deep—compared with what we know about, say, the federal government.

I HAVE TRIED TO REMEDY MY IGNORANCE in the professor's age-old ways: reading and asking questions of knowledgeable colleagues, including a former Army officer and an Israeli former student. Whenever I can, I talk to my son and his friends. I have learned a little. I know, now, that when politicians speak of war as something that can be clean and simple, that won't demand terrible actions of those who fight and terrible suffering from civilians, they lie. But I'm still very ignorant, and most of my fellow professors know even less than I do. We who teach young men and women need to know more about what we ask some of them to do on our behalf and what it takes to do their jobs.

IT WOULDN'T HURT TO ASK HOW THEY and their commanders have done better than the university at some tasks that really matter for the United States. My son has taken a lot of orders from people of color—every color. The colonel who commanded the group with which he initially trained wore a size-24 flight suit when he met her, since she was pregnant with her third child. I can't be the only old white male professor who would like to see universities look more like the military, in these respects, than they do now.

BUT I ALSO SUSPECT THAT THE MILITARY needs us—especially those of us who work not in policy studies or international relations but in the humanities and soft social sciences. I don't mean that we should become amateur pundits. One lesson of the last few years, surely, is that we should ignore pundits and listen to people who know what they're talking about.

WELL, WE HUMANISTS KNOW A FEW important things. We know that language is more powerful than any other weapon and that you can't change the ideas of someone you can't talk to. We know that local history and lived culture shape men and women in ways that no amount of violence can change. We know that many of our policies have not, in recent years, given foreigners good reasons for associating the United States with enlightenment and liberty. We need to make these things clear to those who fight and die in our name and to the civilian authorities who send them into battle. We won't achieve that by pulling up the hems of our garments and refusing to have anything to do with them.

RECENT STORIES SUGGEST THAT IMPORtant people in the military have grasped some of these points. It's time, and past time, to start more conversations: time for each of these institutions, and its inhabitants, to learn more about the other. Above all, it's time to find factual, substantive ways of talking about what the military can and can't do and about how it could be more effective and less destructive when it must wage war. Here in Princeton's bubble, where America's wars are never all that far away, it seems possible that we could do this.

ANTHONY GRAFTON

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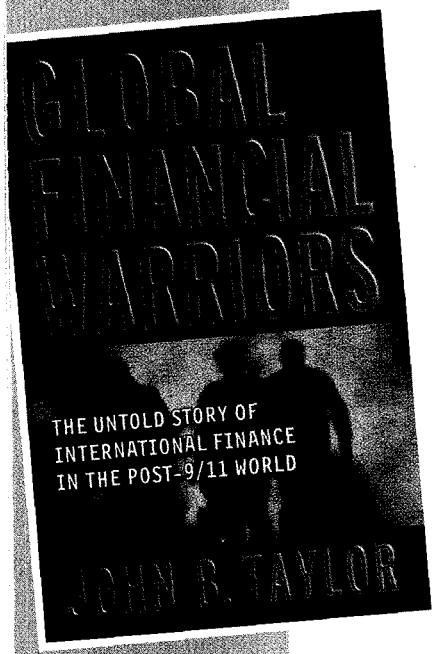

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John B. Taylor *was Treasury Under Secretary for international affairs from 2001 to 2005. A senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, he is also the Mary and Robert Raymond Professor of Economics at Stanford.*

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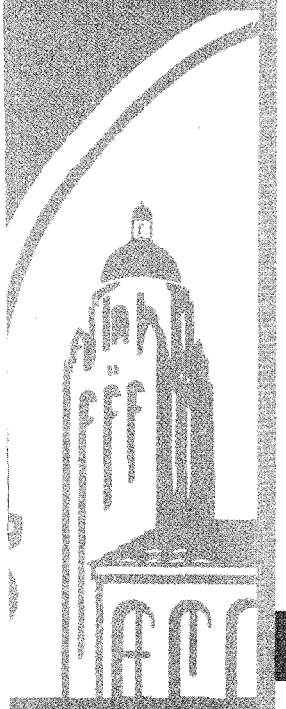

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